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Thatcherism today

Stuart Hall goes back to basics

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SUNDAY SHOPPING

On 19th November the Sunday Trading Bill was published.

This will be one of the most important Bills for the new Session of Parliament. It is designed to reform the archaic Sunday shopping laws in England and Wales.

MPs have been offered a choice of options:
Remove all restrictions;
Severe restrictions on which shops can open;

And the compromise option - and likely winner - proposed by the Shopping Hours Reform Council. This says that on Sundays:

* *Small shops should be able to open whenever they like.*

* *Big stores could open for six hours.*

* *Shopworking would be voluntary with enhanced pay. There would be statutory legal protection for those who did not want to work on Sundays.*

Millions of people want to shop on Sundays and many thousands want the right to work.

* *Opinions polls repeatedly show that two-thirds of shoppers want to be able to shop on Sundays.*

* *16 million people shop every Sunday - five million of them in big supermarkets.*

* *More than 80,000 shopworkers would lose some, or all, of their income if MPs fail to vote for reforming Sunday shopping.*

Whatever MPs decide, local councils will have to enforce the new law and the majority of councils support total deregulation or the SHRC option.

Senior lawyers say that the restrictive option would create an expensive, bureaucratic and legal nightmare.

For further information please contact:
The Shopping Hours Reform Council,
36, Broadway, London SW1H 0BH
Telephone: 071 233 0366 Fax: 071 222 5258

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Peter Jukes; Elizabeth Young; Kathryn Hughes on sequelitis

PrintOut
Cheap chic: gifts for under £10

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Deregulation is no way to treat shopworkers

Changing the Sunday trading law

If the Government were to persuade Parliament to repeal all regulations governing shopping hours and legalise unlimited Sunday trading it would be very bad news for shopworkers and for small shopkeepers. Shop staff would soon be expected to work regular Sundays for no extra pay. Thousands of permanent full-time jobs would go with more and more staff employed as weekend-only casuals.

Usdaw, the Shopworkers Union, wants partial reform so that bigger shops may open for up to six hours. But we also need effective worker protection for all retail staff in England, Wales and Scotland that will:

- Guarantee all shop managers and staff the legal right to refuse to work Sundays. This must cover both new and existing employees.
- Give a legal entitlement to double-time payment for those who choose to work Sundays.

Usdaw UNITY IS STRENGTH

President: **AUDREY WISE** *General Secretary:* **D. GARFIELD DAVIES**

Union of Shop, Distributive and Allied Workers
188 Wilmslow Road, Manchester M14 6LJ

Usdaw UNITY IS STRENGTH

RSAR

RETAILERS FOR SHOPS ACT REFORM

THE COMPROMISE SOLUTION TO SUNDAY TRADING

We represent the views of retailers large and small from the high streets' best known names to local shops.

Our proposals offer a sensible and realistic compromise to the issue of Sunday trading, balancing the needs of consumers, retailers, employees and the wider community.

The key proposals, which are also supported by the Keep Sunday Special campaign, are:

- **small convenience and leisure shops allowed to open every Sunday;**
- **garden centres and DIY stores allowed to open every Sunday;**
- **all shops allowed to open on the four Sundays before Christmas;**
- **employees protected from compulsory Sunday**

For further information contact RSAR on
Tel: 071-976 0481; Fax: 071-222 5872
7 The Sanctuary, Parliament Square,
London SW1P 3JS

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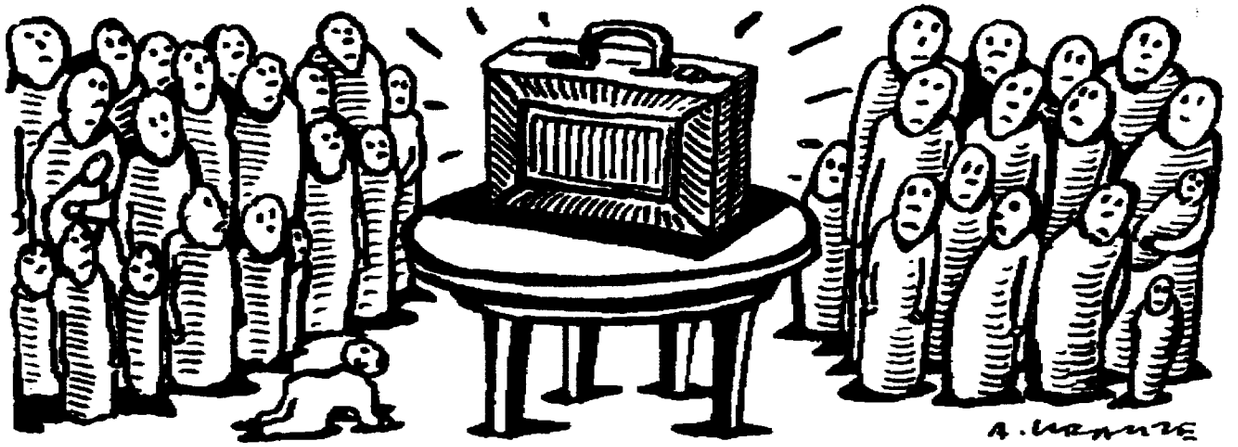

A budget for recovery

Kenneth Clarke's first budget as Chancellor of the Exchequer, to be unveiled next Tuesday, has been the subject of more speculation than any other budget in the past decade. This is partly a matter of the novelty of having a budget in November combined with the autumn statement on public spending—but it is also the product of a widespread public feeling that the economy is in a mess, and that what Clarke does next week will determine whether the mess is cleared up or whether it gets worse.

Britain has been in recession for nearly four years now, and signs of recovery are still faint. For all Britain's recent successes in non-EC export markets, there is still a strong possibility that the deepening European recession will scupper hopes of a sustained upturn—just ask those Nissan workers now being offered voluntary redundancy because no one in Europe is buying cars.

In any case, if unemployment *has* peaked, it has only just done so—and it still blights millions of lives. Even those in work suffer its consequences: fear of unemployment is still holding back consumer confidence, and the cost of keeping around three million people on the dole is horrendous. Taking into account benefits and lost tax revenue, each unemployed worker costs the Treasury nearly £9,000 a year, which means that the cost, for example, of keeping the 500,000 unemployed building workers out of work is around £4.5 billion a year.

Meanwhile, everywhere you look there is work to be done: crumbling council blocks, sewers and schools to repair, ancient tube trains and buses to replace, railways and houses to build. The waste of unemployment is obscene and absurd. Britain desperately needs a budget that lays the foundations for a sustained economic recovery.

What is not required is what Clarke seems to be preparing—an assault on public borrowing on two fronts, with cuts in state spending and increases in taxation aimed at shaving some £3 billion off the public sector borrowing requirement (which is currently running at £50 billion). The fragile nature of the recovery makes it imperative that the Chancellor does nothing to reduce the overall level of demand in the economy: state spending should be kept at current levels or even increased, with the overall burden of taxation increased only to fund an expansion of state spending on investment.

In similar vein, any tax or spending changes should on no account be regressive: even leaving aside the persuasive moral and social arguments for a more equal society, progressive redistributive measures have economic benefits. They have a modest reflationary impact because poor people tend to spend money rather than salt it away; and they help the trade balance by putting a block on the tendency of rich people to buy imported luxuries, rather than home-produced goods.

Yet all the talk is of Clarke increasing National Insurance contributions (an income tax that hits the worst-off hardest) and direct taxes on non-luxury items, while reducing benefit entitlements—all of which will harm prospects for recovery.

Some of the measures, both long-term and short-term, that should be taken next week have been elaborated by Gordon Brown and other Labour spokespersons in the past year: tax breaks for industrial investment and for training, a training levy, taxes on speculative share and money market transactions, release of receipts from council house sales to allow new council house building, lease-buying of trains, a windfall tax on privatised utility profits, a stricter regime to prevent tax evasion, a redefinition of public borrowing to distinguish borrowing for investment from borrowing for the current account, and so on.

But other measures that are equally applicable in the current economic climate seem to have been discreetly abandoned by Labour for electoral reasons since the shadow budget just before last year's general election. In particular, it dropped plans for a top income tax rate of 50 per cent on those on £40,000 a year and abolition of the ceiling on National Insurance contributions. Both should be revived, although both need to be a lot better sold to the electorate than they were last time.

And then there is a whole raft of proposals that never get a look-in these days in Labour's top echelons. The most obvious is abolition of mortgage interest tax relief—essentially a regressive subsidy to affluent home-owners, which is retained by the government only for the most cynical of political reasons. The savings from abolishing MIRAS should be ploughed straight into building houses for those on low incomes.

There are others, too, from wealth taxes, through energy taxes that do not hit the poorest as VAT on domestic fuel will, to disbanding the British Army of the Rhine and using the savings on a massive employment programme. In all these cases, the reason for Labour's lack of enthusiasm has little to do with economics and a lot to do with fear of what the Tory press will say.

Of course, there are limits to what a single medium-sized nation-state can do to conquer unemployment and recession: the experience of France in the early eighties shows that there is little mileage today in the sort of one-nation Keynesianism that used to form the basis of all left-of-centre alternative economic strategies. That is why a programme for recovery in Britain would have to be matched with proposals for a European recovery programme, initially based on the intergovernmental framework suggested by Jacques Delors (unceremoniously blocked by the British last week), but ultimately carried out by federal European institutions.

Nevertheless, it remains in the power of the medium-sized nation-state to make a substantial difference—and it is a scandal that Clark will deliver a package that does nothing (or worse) for recovery.

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Views on London

"John Gummer, Secretary of State for the Environment and Minister for London, would like to hear your views about London. He hopes you will be able to take the time to fill in this questionnaire" (from *London: making the best better*, available from DoE, PO Box 151, London E15 2HF)

Q1: What do you most appreciate about London? (There are 63 options on offer, including "cosmopolitan society", "cycle routes" and "clean air")

Dear Mr Gummer: Do you mind if we skip the questionnaire as such—we find it a bit limiting. Our favourite things about London are the traffic, the bomb alerts on the Underground, and being jammed in the Tube like cattle in a truck. We like the way driver-operated buses have to stop for hours while one person fumbles for their change. We like the parking and the clamping. We like the way you can whizz up and down the Thames, now that the Riverbus has given up the ghost.

We like the crime. We like the fact that burglaries are ten-a-penny, and muggings so common they go practically unremarked. We appreciate the drug-dealing in residential areas—it lends a place atmosphere. Not to mention when innocent policemen get caught in the crossfire, as PC Dunne was in Clapham.

OK, enough cynicism. Let's be positive. We like your document *London: making the best better*. We like the view of Big Ben on the front, seen through out-of-focus tulips. And we'd agree with you that London has a lot of things going for it. Nice parks, historic buildings, plenty to do. Great hospitals, except that we're a bit worried about places like Barts and University College Hospital, which seem to be on the way out.

We *definitely* like the culture. Having said that, it was nicer when you didn't have to pay £4.50 to see the giant ground sloth in the Natural History Museum. The theatres are great, though we do worry a bit that places like the Young Vic and the Lyric Hammersmith are living on a knife-edge.

You mention London's 400 libraries, and we couldn't agree more. But have you been to a public library recently? After all those council cuts, they're very often shut . . .

Q2: Thinking about one of the things you like most about London, how could it be improved?

By restricting car use in the city centre. By bringing back bus conductors. By bringing in trams. By building the Hackney-Chelsea tube line and speeding up the Paddington-Liverpool Street "Crossrail" link. By not insisting that every transport project must have private cash in it (bearing in mind the saga of unloved, inaccessible Canary Wharf).

Q3: What can London learn from other cities?

Invest in the Underground—Beijing is building a state-of-the-art metro with UK technology that we're too mean to use here. Have an elected mayor, like New York or Jerusalem. Link the capital's police to the capital's people, instead of making the Met report to the Home Secretary, an absurd archaism.

Q4: What aspects of London do you think are off-putting to visitors?

Well, there's the dirt, the dogshit and the occasional dead rat. Not to mention those homeless people sleeping in doorways and accosting you for change.

Q5: What aspects of London do you think are attractive to visitors and businesses?

Why are you so obsessed with businesses?

Q6: Have you any other suggestions for improving London?

We know we're not meant to mention this, but we would quite like an elected authority. According to a poll commissioned by the Association of London Authorities, four out of five Londoners want an elected body to coordinate services. Yet all you're offering is an unelected quango, "London First" (led by a businessman), which will draw up a "prospectus" for the capital. Don't you think it's time you stopped treating Londoners like children and took their views seriously?

FELIX BENNETT

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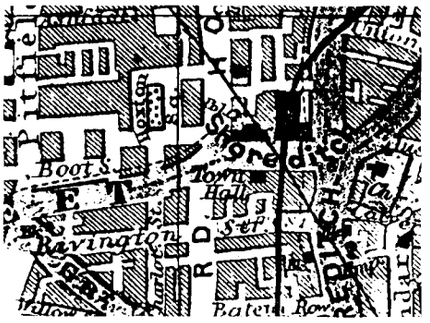
SHOREDITCH



As if backing Labour for the general election last year wasn't enough to cause apoplexy in its well-heeled readers, the Financial Times has now come within a whisker of endorsing the former Communist Party of Italy. A leader in the businessperson's bible on last week's Italian local elections expounded on how the Party of the Democratic Left (PDS) "has shown it can run successful local alliances with parties such as the Greens and Radicals. Although the ex-Communist Party's economic policies, in particular, need much sharper definition, it is on the way to becoming the standard-bearer of Italian social democracy . . ." It is becoming increasingly clear to Shoreditch why the FT is called "the pink'un".

Labour's new shadow Scottish Secretary, George Robertson (see Influences, page 13), had a baptism of fire in the Commons this week, fighting government plans to rearrange local authorities in Scotland. Today (Friday), he'll address a more congenial audience at the Scottish Constitutional Convention (no Tories, you see, *and* no Scot Nats). The cross-party convention, which thrashed out a blueprint for self-government in the run-up to the last election, has gone very quiet since. But according to Convention secretary Bruce Black, Friday's shindig "should prove that reports of its death are greatly exaggerated". The meeting will discuss "the state of the nation" (the Scots' nation, that is), and what progress has been made towards the goal of a Scottish Parliament. The Edinburgh venue will be—oh yes—Parliament Square.

War on Want's annual conference takes place in London this Saturday, with racism, South Africa and Palestine high on the agenda. Ever since the date was announced, however, WOW has been the target of threats from Combat 18—the neo-Nazi group with a well-deserved reputation for violence. It has taken particular exception to the presence at the conference of the ANC's Mendi Msimang. C-18 has threatened that Msimang "will not be allowed to speak". Harassing organisations campaigning against world poverty is a new strategy of the boneheads; other charities have received similar threats. The conference is going ahead, with appropriate security. Readers who haven't already booked can call 071-620 1111 for more information.

An informative insight, courtesy of a report in the magazine *Police Review*, into how the investigation into the wrongful conviction of the Tottenham Three may shape up. In 1991, the Appeal Court cleared the three men of the murder of PC Keith Blakelock; a statement supposedly made by Winston Silcott at the time of his arrest is alleged to have been altered. Detective Chief Superintendent Graham Melvin, who headed the original investigation into the murder, is now awaiting trial on charges of conspiracy and perjury. But then, if he waits long enough, the case against him may well be dropped; the new inquiry into Blakelock's killing, set up after Silcott *et al* were cleared, has identified 12 other suspects for the murder. A report is expected to be submitted to the DPP before Christmas.

The timing is significant in its effect on the trial of Melvin, which doesn't start until the judge decides what evidence can be admitted—a decision that police circles are saying is unlikely to be made before January. By then, so a "senior Met detective" explains in *Police Review*, "the [report into Blakelock's killing] will be with the CPS, and it is unlikely that Mr Melvin's trial could go ahead until they decide on new prosecutions". Which will mean even more waiting, the unnamed detective adds: "If there are new prosecutions, it could be 18 months before the trial, and it is unlikely that Mr Melvin's trial would begin until that one was over."

But once started, Melvin's trial could be over pretty quickly, the detective goes on to predict: "Mr Melvin's lawyers would then be likely to apply for abuse of process, in that it is clearly unjust to keep a defendant waiting for over four years for his case to be decided." Sounds familiar? The "abuse of process" appeal is what ensured that no officers were prosecuted for various offences that were alleged to have taken place at demonstrations in Wapping during the 1986 News International dispute. Campaigners for the Tottenham Three will be, shall we say, unsurprised should a similar outcome occur in the trial of Graham Melvin.

Shoreditch doesn't quite know what to think of the following story. The German daily newspaper Suddeutche Zeitung ran a feature in its weekly magazine describing acts of violence against women in Bosnia witnessed by one of its staff writers. These included multiple rape, beatings, enforced prostitution, child torture in front of mothers, and even murder. Incorporated into the ink used to print the headline were seven litres of blood, donated by a number of Serb, Croat and Muslim women to represent the three ethnic divisions in Bosnia, and two German women protestors.

Are we becoming so anaesthetised to horror that we need this sort of thing to be able to feel anger? And where will it all end? What other bodily excretions could be made use of? How about semen for date rape stories, vomit for articles on bulimia, or worst of all, diarrhoeal liquids mixed into the headlines above pieces on third-world disease and dysentary?

FOURTH ESTATE

A regular monitor of the tabloid press

18 November: "END OF THE WORLD," scream both the *Mirror* and the *Sun* apropos the dismal performance of the England football team. Elsewhere, the mood is celebratory, however. "Inflation hits 25-year low," announces the splash on the *Daily Express* front page.

19 November: "Major's thin top lip says he's hot to trot," claims the *Sun*, which has recruited an "expert in physiognomy—the ancient Chinese art of telling people's characters from their faces". "Lalian Young says: 'Anyone with a thin lip is a beast in bed. They're overwhelmingly passionate and make the most enthusiastic lovers.'"

20 November: A Franklin cartoon in the *Sun* follows up the "Major sexy" story, picturing the Prime Minister sitting on the front bench in the Commons with several naked women. What can it mean? Meanwhile, all the Tory tabloids are in seventh heaven over the trade figures. "It's the sort of good news which Martyn Lewis wants more of: British exports rose a commendable 101 per cent in the first nine months of this year," says the *Express*, temporarily forgetting its qualms about the Red Menace.

21 November: The *Mail on Sunday* runs a poll which shows that a clear majority of voters believe cuts in defence spending to be the best way of reducing Britain's budget deficit. "More than half of those polled, 54 per cent, said defence was the area where they most wanted the government to make savings." Undeterred, the paper's leader column argues: "Britain's armed forces are already working at the limit. Further cuts could see them snap."

22 November: It appears that Kenneth Clarke has absolutely no plans to cut defence spending in next week's budget: if reports of leaks in the *Mirror* and *Today* are accurate, the target is welfare spending. "Chancellor Kenneth Clarke is already planning a £500 million a year attack on dole payments in next week's budget," reports the *Mirror*. "He is considering halving to six months the time the jobless can claim unemployment benefit." The *Sun*, meanwhile, applauds what it says are Clarke's plans to tax child benefit for the well-off.

23 November: Well, actually child benefit *isn't* going to be taxed after all. "Boost for mothers as child benefit survives tax threat," crows the *Express*, above a report of Treasury Secretary Michael Portillo's denial of widespread rumours.

24 November: Attention turns to the resignation of the manager of the England football team. "The *Sun* doesn't like to kick a man when he's down," says a leader in Kelvin's comic. "In Graham Taylor's case we'll make an exception. There's only one thing to say to the turnip. Squelch!"

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Sean French on why humour is no laughing matter

A year or so ago, I found myself awake and out of bed at about 7am, groggily switching between channels in order to find some cartoons that would distract the children and allow me to sneak back to bed. This gave me one of my rare glimpses of breakfast television, and I remember seeing Dudley Moore, looking worse than I felt, being interviewed live on a sofa.

It was a shocking moment. Moore is famous and rich and in his late fifties. Yet he had clearly got out of bed at about 5 o'clock on a Sunday morning, in the dark, and had been driven across London to be asked inanities while being watched by nightwatchmen, serial killers and the other weirdos likely to be tuning in at such a bizarre time of day. Perhaps it all counts as a form of self-marketing. "Never miss a chance to have sex or appear on television," said Gore Vidal, and there does seem to be something unanswerable about its summons.

Who am I to talk? The last time I appeared on television, I spent a couple of days reading a book, another writing about it, another day rewriting, half a day rewriting that in order to turn it back the way it was at the beginning, and then another half day sitting on a giant mock-up of a book, being lit from a variety of angles. As I was delivering my piece and the camera was tracking past me and zooming in on me, I numbly felt a complete idiot and yet, when it was broadcast, through the magic of television, I looked and sounded a complete idiot as well. And all for a fee of about the amount that you pay Dyno-Rod to come and spend one minute shoving a pipe down your lavatory and then another four minutes filling out the credit card slip.

"I am on television, therefore I exist," as René Descartes might have said if he had worked in the media. But then Descartes had his own sort of vanity. "Never miss a chance to have sex or appear before royalty," as Gore Vidal might have said if he had lived in the early 16th century. This had its dangers as well. Descartes was summoned to Sweden to teach philosophy to Queen Christina, and died from the cold within a year. The case of the Danish astronomer Tycho Brahe was even worse. He was present at court one day and was too embarrassed to ask if he could go out for a pee. His bladder burst and he died. Better, no doubt, to pee on the floor as they did at Versailles or to look a twit on a model of a giant book on a late-night arts programme that is hardly seen by anybody anyway.

But did Gore Vidal mean his maxim to be taken literally? Should we have sex with anyone at all, should the opportunity present itself? Would he go on any television programme, whatever its subject? This heretical question occurred to me last week while watching *Have I Got News For You* on which the two guests were Frank Bough and the feminist comedian Jo Brand.

Bough's wholesome reputation and, consequently, his television career were severely damaged by some reports on his private life in the sleazier tabloids. It was the normal sex with tarts stuff that we all know—don't we, for God's sake?—is not that uncommon among British men. Ian Hislop, editor of *Private Eye* and one of the regular participants on the programme, regularly makes jokes about the Bough case whenever there is anything that can be construed as a reference to S&M. It may seem callous to pillory somebody who has already been relentlessly persecuted by the tabloid press, but then that has always been part of the *Private Eye* style.

When Bough appeared on the show, it was, of course, ghastly. There was a photograph of some stockinged legs, and Jo Brand said something like: "That could have been Frank Bough in earlier days." Bough replied with an uneasy grin (because guests appearing on shows like that together are all meant to seem good friends), and said he would ignore the possible libel, to which Hislop replied that in order to be libellous, something had to be untrue.

This wasn't just horrible, it was horrible in lots of different ways at the same time. Would Jo Brand taunt, say, a teacher who had been sacked because she was a lesbian? Would she sneer at somebody whose past drug problems had been raked up by the tabloids in order to destroy them? The problem with humour as a weapon is that it is easiest to use against people who are in a position of weakness. I've previously thought Brand was terrific, tough and intelligent, but I saw little difference between her facile sneers and Bernard Manning's taunts against blacks and Asians.

I am a long way from being a fan of Richard Ingrams, the previous editor of *Private Eye*, but at least there was a sense that his black satiric stiletto could be turned on anybody. I felt that Bough was an irresistible target for Hislop not because he was a figure who needed cutting down to size, but because he is never going to have the power to deny Hislop work.

I was dismayed most of all by Bough's motivation in going on the programme in the first place. Did he hope to prove that he could take a joke? He didn't look as if he was enjoying it very much when the joke was—inevitably—made. It may have seemed like a good career move or a way of shaming them into stopping their grotesque persecution of him. Or perhaps, like everybody else, he just couldn't resist an invitation to appear on television.

Maybe, as in the comparison with Descartes, we should be grateful that we have got as far as we have. For a few trivial misdemeanours, Oscar Wilde was sentenced to hard labour, declared bankrupt, stripped of all possessions, his health broken and driven into exile, while his family were forced to change their name. Half an hour of being degraded on television is probably preferable.

I'm troubled by two advertising posters, though I'm a little worried about mentioning them, since they'll probably turn out to be covert ads for some new sort of video game and I'm missing the point. The first is a poster warning about the dangers of fireworks. A little child's head is completely swathed in bandages and the caption reads: "Babyface, you *had* the cutest little babyface."

The second is a poster about combating dyslexia, which has two photographs of the same boy as a small child and then as an adolescent. The text is: "At seven spelling was murder, at 16 it was suicide." In this case, I keep wondering whether this is a photograph of a real suicide case or whether a model was used, and which would be worse. The idea of the collapse of a life, the personal suffering of the subject and the devastation that suicide causes those left behind, being used as an advertisement, even for a good cause, seems shocking. "That's my boy, over there, the one, well, actually both of them on that poster. Well, yes he did suffer terribly from depression and was intensely shy and withdrawn. Yet somehow I think he would be pleased to be on posters all over the country proclaiming his life had been a failure."

Yet the idea that the pictures could be staged seems still more disturbing. You are introduced to someone in a pub and have an uneasy feeling of recognition. Did something terrible happen to him? Was there some sort of scandal? Then you realise that this is the person you thought had committed suicide because he hadn't been taught to read properly. Or what about the model himself, if he is a model: "Have I done any work lately? Yet, I'm the one in the poster who committed suicide. I didn't get any reviews, but I boosted revenues by 10 per cent."

Mainly, though, I disliked the tired, lazy cleverness of the two captions. Of course you can be funny about any subject, and there is absolutely nothing off limits. But this is the opposite, a compulsive need to be emptily amusing about absolutely everything that is permeating the media. Just look at the proliferation of empty puns in almost every headline in the quality press. Can we have a moratorium for a while on cleverness and humour? Readers may have observed that my own has already been in force for many years.

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JOHN COLE

The tinderbox of Ulster

In Belfast on Monday, my nose was bumped sharply against a fact I have understood before, but had forgotten: how different are the news agendas of London/Whitehall and of Northern Ireland.

In the London-based media, the news about Ireland concentrated on John Major's quick move to counter the opportunistic attack about an amnesty for terrorists allegedly being mounted on him by Margaret Thatcher. In other words, the Prime Minister's preoccupation was with his Westminster political base. Understandably, for it often needs protection from his Rt Hon and Hon Friends.

But the lead story on the BBC Northern Ireland Monday morning bulletins was about an attempt by the IRA to kill a former member of the Royal Irish Regiment (successor to the Ulster Defence Regiment). Mercifully, it failed, and so another family of potential orphans, huddled to the ground for safety by their mother as the shots were fired, was spared that misery.

Is it surprising that in Ulster itself, the hopes for peace are spiced with more fear—or realism—than they are in places where readers/audiences hear only distantly, if at all, the constant rumble of sectarian hatred? Is it unreasonable to believe that, if the IRA is seriously contemplating a cessation of violence by Christmas, it ought to avoid digging new graves in the 11th month of the final year?

Well, yes, it is unreasonable, if you understand the IRA's methods, how it estimates its own achievement, and its ambitions. The accepted, and trite, view is that its 25 years of violence has achieved nothing, other than 3,000 dead, and numerous men, and some women, spending the best years of their lives in prison. That is the conclusion of those who accept unquestioningly the "we will never give way to men of violence" assurances of successive British and Irish governments.

But consider events from the IRA's standpoint. It has destabilised Northern Ireland, and established in many British people's minds the basic nationalist thesis, that it is "a failed political entity". It has so alarmed governments that the province is in perpetual limbo, as a bewildering succession of constitutional innovations, from rolling devolution to joint sovereignty, are contemplated, rejected, or left lying around.

Would Gerry Adams not be entitled to remind John Hume and Albert Reynolds—perhaps he has?—that it was militant republicanism, rather than constitutional nationalism, that made Dublin's present role in the affairs of Ulster even conceivable? Would Margaret Thatcher have agreed to the Anglo-Irish Agreement if the murder of Conservative colleagues in the Brighton bombing, as well as other attacks on the British mainland, had not convinced her that terrorism was not going to be defeated?

Despite the time-tabling noises from Unionist politicians, if violence were to cease, Sinn Fein ought to have a role in the eventual political settlement. And in my judgment, the release of convicted terrorists before their sentences have expired will inevitably form part of that settlement: IRA "doves", if they exist, would have no chance of persuading their organisation to cease violence unless they could hold out such a hope to their prisoners.

True, both these propositions contain dangers: of tit-for-tat murders of released terrorists from both camps; of Sinn Fein frustration at the scope of democratic power. For without the importance that the armalite gives, Sinn Fein's electoral bargaining-power is not great: practically nothing in the Republic, and about as significant as the non-sectarian, and largely middle-class Alliance Party in the North. Would that really satisfy Sinn Fein? It doesn't have as many votes as James Molyneaux, Ian Paisley or John Hume, so it could not expect as strong a voice.

If a settlement displeases the IRA or the UDA, they have only to perpetrate atrocities to blow it apart

Another misleading cliché of the Ulster crisis is that no party can have a veto on political progress. The truth is that almost any group has a veto. The SDLP proved that in the seventies, with the ancient Irish tradition of the boycott, which the DUP seems determined to emulate. But vetoes through guns and explosives are more vicious. If a settlement is reached that displeases either the IRA or the UDA and UVF, they have only to perpetrate another series of atrocities to blow the settlement apart. If the UDA, armed principally with wooden staves in 1974, were allowed to do that, what would the more deadly armoury of both sets of paramilitaries today achieve?

Such steadfast gloom about the hopes of peace, which are being so sedulously advanced by the two governments, will distress many readers. But it is dangerous to arouse false hopes. Do people realise that political talks in themselves, "getting people round a table", are not an end? They just might be a beginning, but—with parties as far apart as are the two governments, and the Northern Ireland political parties, including Sinn Fein—not necessarily a fruitful beginning.

As Anthony Bevins wrote in the *Observer*: "It is important to read the words that are spoken with infinite care; they are the footsteps of the diplomatic dance"; and he quotes a Whitehall spokesman as saying: "The two governments have been borrowing each other's language." It is to such careful analysis of the texts available that I have been drawing readers' attention in recent weeks.

The trouble is, if Kevin McNamara (*NSS*, 12 November) is right, that the diplomatic "language" used even on the most crucial matters is ambiguous. When Article 1 of the Anglo-Irish Agreement guaranteed that there would be no change in the status of Northern Ireland without consent, did the two governments realise that one (London) was saying its present status was as part of the United Kingdom, and the other (Dublin) that it was as defined in Section 2 of the Irish Constitution, part of the Republic? This in an international treaty solemnly lodged with the United Nations!

Ambiguity, in the tinderbox of Ulster, is not diplomatic, but dangerous. Ambiguity of both status and meaning engulfs the document leaked from Dublin. The Taoiseach disowns it, but does not deny its existence. It asks London to recognise "the full legitimacy and value of the goal of Irish unity". *Cui bono*, if Dublin intends in almost the same breath to repeal the clause in its constitution that claims such unity?

Because, says Albert Reynolds, a Fianna Fail-led government would simply be handing over Republican leadership to Sinn Fein and the IRA, if it were to try, in the required constitutional referendum, to repeal Sections 2 and 3 without gaining a *quid pro quo*. But would it be helpful simultaneously to plant false hopes in Republican breasts, and frightened ones among Unionists?

Another *Observer* writer, Mary Holland, is worried that a careful exchange of key phrases and code words is building up dangerously high expectations: "At the moment, for all the careful phrasing of the texts so meticulously crafted in Dublin and London, it is difficult to detect a firm basis for hope."

We must just trust that the High Contracting Parties are not simply, and cynically, manoeuvring to make sure that, if peace does not "come dropping slow"—to hijack Yeats—or even fast, somebody other than themselves gets the blame.

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Italy opts for polarisation

Last Sunday's local elections in Italy showed just how keen voters are to kick out the discredited political class that has run the country since the war.

Except in a few provincial towns, the Christian Democrats (DC), in power at national level without a break since 1945, collapsed, reaching just 10 per cent of the vote in Rome and Naples. Meanwhile, its partners in government, particularly the Socialist Party (PSI), almost disappeared. In the north of the country, politics is now essentially polarised between the former-communist Party of the Democratic Left (PDS) and the autonomist Northern League, while in the south the battle is between the PDS (and a handful of allies) and the neo-fascist Movimento Sociale Italiano (MSI).

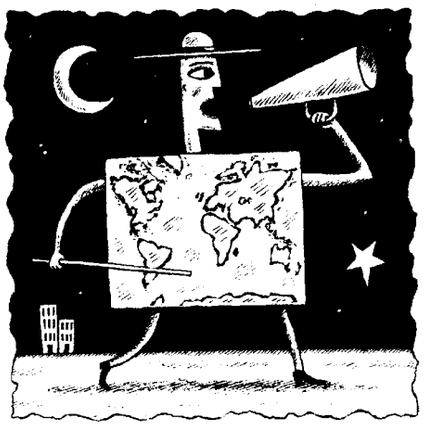
The elections, for more than 400 councils, were the first to take place using a complex new system under which voters elect mayors directly, with the two leading candidates going forward to a second-round ballot if no one takes more than 50 per cent of the vote in the first round. Councils are elected on a party list system.

In the six big city elections that were generally considered the most important contests, the only candidate to win outright in Sunday's first round was Leoluca Orlando, the charismatic leader of the left-leaning anti-mafia Rete (Network), who took 75 per cent of the vote in the Sicilian capital of Palermo. His humiliation of the city's ruling Mafia-DC political machine was followed by an all-night street party.

In the other two southern city elections, however, the surprise was the showing of the far-right. In Naples, the run-off on 5 December will be between Antonio Bassolino (backed by the PDS, the Greens, Rete and the hardline communist group Rifondazione Comunista), with 42 per cent of the first-round vote, and the MSI's Allesandro Mussolini, who took 31 per cent. In Rome, the MSI did even better, its leader Gianfranco Fini taking 36 per cent after a campaign in which a significant part of the local DC appears to have campaigned for the MSI. In the second round, he faces Francesco Rutelli, a Green backed by the PDS and the "clean" centre-right followers of former-DC rebel Mario Segni. Rutelli is narrow favourite, largely because he can rely on nearly all the 9 per cent of votes cast on Sunday for Rifondazione.

While the showing of the MSI is a shock and undoubtedly reflects widespread enthusiasm for authoritarian leadership, it is also a protest vote. With Segni's followers largely allied with the left, traditional centre-right voters in the south, weary of the corruption of the old parties, had nowhere else to turn.

In Trieste, the picture is similar: the MSI



candidate, Giulio Staffieri, took 33 per cent to come runner-up to Riccaro Illy, backed by the PDS, the DC and Segni, on 39 per cent. But elsewhere in the north the beneficiary of the right-wing protest vote was the Northern League, which came second in Genoa and Venice, behind candidates supported by the PDS. In the latter two cities, as in Milan in June, those centre-right voters who stuck with the old parties are likely to swing behind the League in the second round, probably giving it victory.

The implications of last Sunday for national politics are clear. The high turn-out and the results will create yet more pressure on the governing parties to go for a general election sooner rather than later—which in turn will create yet more resistance from politicians who stand to lose a lifetime's power and privileges. The next month, in other words, is likely to see Italy lurch further into political crisis.

David Henderson

German SPD moves right

The taming of Germany's Social Democrats is well underway. Their conference last week in Wiesbaden—the last major SPD gathering before next year's daunting series of 20 elections—saw party leader Rudolf Scharping win backing for a move away from the radical environmentalism and civil libertarianism that characterised the SPD in the 1980s.

In an impressive demonstration of power politics, Scharping managed to isolate and outmanoeuvre his opponents and ensure that his own policy proposals—to back deployment of German troops outside Germany under the UN banner, to allow the introduction of bugging and phone-tapping by the secret services, and to opt for a fiscally orthodox economic policy—emerged unscathed.

One reason for Scharping's success is the deep frustration felt by many SPD activists at the performance of his predecessor, Bjorn Engholm, forced to resign this year after the exposure of his involvement in a political dirty-tricks campaign. Another is that there is simply a stronger and more widespread yearning for power among party members than there was even six months ago. Scharping, whose sights are fixed firmly on the 1994 general election, has taken every advantage of this mood.

Some prominent left-wing MPs profess not to be overly worried by events at Wiesbaden, but many commentators believe that the conference clears the way for Scharping to engineer a "Grand Coalition" with the ruling Christian Democratic Union (CDU).

In his opening speech at Wiesbaden, Scharping attacked the Bonn government on unemployment and the damage to social harmony caused by the rise of right-wing extremism (fostered, he alleged, by the ruling parties). But the emphasis placed by econonic spokesman Oskar Lafontaine on reducing the budget deficit means the SPD is now occupying much the same ground as the CDU in economic policy. And on several civil liberties issues, the SPD is now closer to the CDU than are the liberal Free Democrats (FDP).

Along with the party leadership's appeal at Wiesbaden for the SPD to return to its traditional working-class constituency rather than attempt to create a rainbow coalition with the "new social movements", all this has been taken by many observers as pointing towards an alliance with the governing parties rather than the Greens. The cherished dream of SPD radicals of a "Red-Green" alliance in Bonn seems to be fading even before it has been brought to fruition at the state level.

It is no coincidence that in the same week as Scharping dragged his party back on to orthodox economic terrain, emphasising technological innovation in industry rather than ecology, the ground-breaking coalition between the SPD and the Greens in the Hamburg city government collapsed after just two months.

The results of the Hamburg elections, in which the SPD lost its control of the council for the first time, were scrutinised eagerly by political commentators. In themselves they represented a huge vote of no confidence in the two major parties, which together lost 18 per cent of the vote.

The immediate impact was to force the SPD into setting up a coalition with the Greens, but in the longer run the result looks set to be to drive the SPD and CDU into each other's arms. With so many elections next year, Scharping has been doing his maths—and has clearly worked out that there are more votes to be won in the centre than there are to be lost on the left. The Hamburg poll showed that the SPD's main problem is that it is losing working-class support to right-wing and protest parties—and electoral alliance with the Greens is unlikely to win such voters back.

Jobs, jobs, jobs is the SPD platform. But, as Lafontaine himself pointed out, no social democratic party in Europe has successfully tackled mass unemployment. Whether the new-look SPD has a better chance than the rest of dealing with it, even party members themselves seem to doubt.

Alison Roberts

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LETTER FROM SANTIAGO

For nearly two decades Chile resembled a political morality play for the international left. After the Hawker Hunter jets of the Prince of Darkness, General Augusto Pinochet, vanquished the socialist hero, President Salvador Allende, in the 1973 coup, there followed 17 years of vicious dictatorship and international opprobrium.

These days Chilean politics have changed from black and white to a uniform grey. In the grimy, polluted capital of Santiago, the campaign billboards for the presidential elections on 11 December are instantly forgettable—grey men in dark suits look sternly out like disapproving bank managers.

The talk is of consensus and stability, as it has been ever since Pinochet ceded the presidency to Patricio Aylwin in 1990. Aylwin is the archetypal grey man: An opponent of Allende who initially supported the 1973 coup before realising his mistake, he has overseen the smoothest transition from military rule to elected government in Latin America. Barring an electoral earthquake, his successor will be Eduardo Frei, the son of a former president and a Christian Democrat like Aylwin—although even less charismatic.

The key to Aylwin's success has been the economy, which has become the envy of Latin America. Last year, surging exports of fresh fruit, salmon, wine, timber and fish meal made Chile the third fastest growing economy in the world (after China and Jordan). Inflation is ticking over at around 12 per cent (restrained by Latin American standards); the government runs a large fiscal surplus; there is plentiful foreign and domestic investment, and along the way Chile has greatly reduced its previous exclusive dependence on copper exports.

The key to Aylwin's success has been the economy, which has become the envy of Latin America

Wall Street is happy, but what about the Chileans? It depends to whom you talk. The Chilean yuppies marvelling at the giant new Alto las Condes shopping mall seem well-pleased. Opened in September, the biggest mall in Latin America is a monument to the new Chile, a temple of consumerism set in the plushest of Santiago's suburbs. Three floors of gleaming boutiques in cream and gold, a vaulted glass roof, palm trees, silent escalators and musak. In the window of the World Book Centre, Pinochet's memoirs share pride of place with the Samantha Fox Personal Diary, the perfect Christmas presents in the new Chile.

Outside the middle-class ghettos, however, the flaws in the model start to appear. Chile's neoliberal success has been built on past oppression and current hardship. In the fruit farms near Santiago, life is hard. "They work you like a slave here, squeeze you dry then throw you out," says Roxana, a smartly dressed 30 year old. She can find work only during the harvest and packing seasons—seven months in the year. The few permanent jobs all go to men, she explains.

Roxana's house is a wooden hut with a tin roof, a few sticks of furniture, no heating and no glass in the windows. The family bakes in summer and freezes in winter. Roxana picks and packs Kiwi fruit, peaches and apples for export, grown on land that used to belong to peasant farmers growing food for Chileans. Under Pinochet, they were bought out by banks and fruit-growers. Now they are casual labourers on their old lands.

Casualisation is central to Chile's economic "miracle". A labour force once accustomed to secure, unionised jobs has been turned into anxious individualists. Pinochet's bloody suppression of the trade union movement played an essential part in the process. "If he hadn't killed all those people, the economy wouldn't be where it is today," says Luz Santibanez, a former exile who now runs her own clothes workshop in Santiago.

The Aylwin government has done little to change the "flexible" labour practices established under Pinochet—sub-contracting, short-term contracts, piece-work and management's right to hire and fire at will.

The increased stress and individualism have undermined Chile's traditionally strong and caring community life. According to community leaders in Santiago's working-class *poblaciones*, family breakdowns and alcoholism are increasing, while opinion polls show the current crime wave to be the most widely condemned aspect of life under Aylwin. "Relationships are changing," says Betty Bizamar, a 26-year-old trade union leader. "People use each other, spend less time with their family. All they talk about is money, things. True friendship is difficult now. You have to be a Quixote to be a union leader these days!"

There are other flaws in the model. The export-driven boom is based almost exclusively on raw or partially processed natural resources. Everything from fish meal to wood chips to copper ore is extracted from Chile's rich natural resource base and shipped overseas. Reliance on these exports leaves Chile open to the vagaries of the international market, which usually favour the industrial economies at the expense of the commodity producers. Copper prices are currently at their lowest for six years, there is a world glut of Kiwi fruit, and following a bumper European crop, the EC has closed its doors to Chilean apples. The result has been a sudden drop-off in export income this year and falling growth. If this turns out to be more than a temporary blip, the post-Pinochet consensus could easilycome apart.

Duncan Green

NEW STATESMAN & SOCIETY

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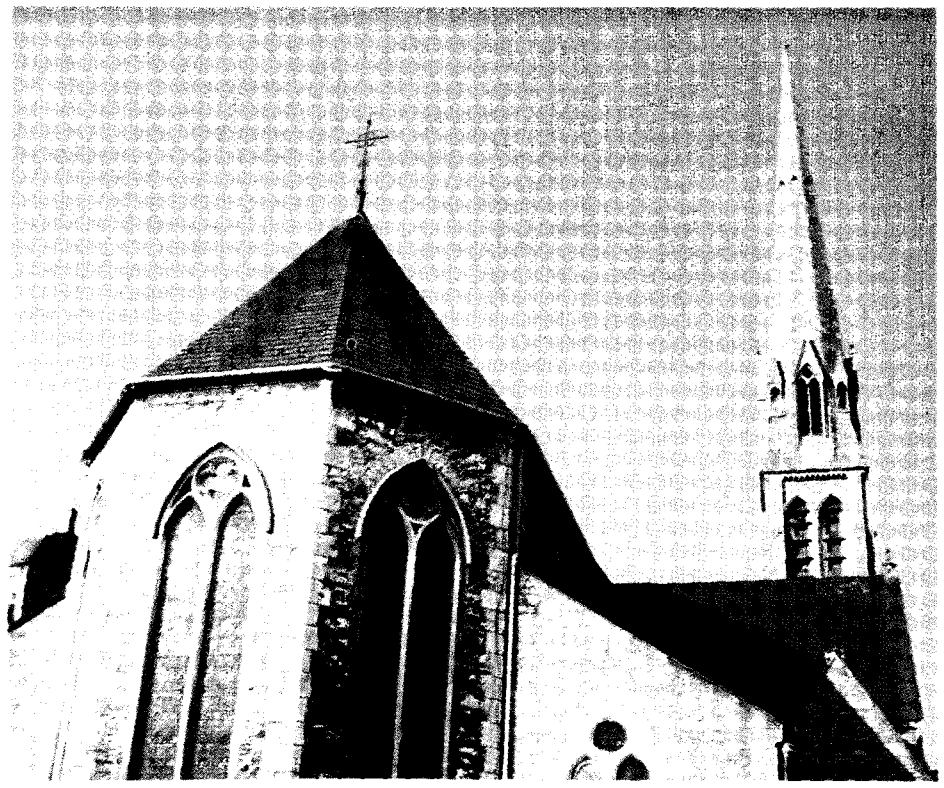
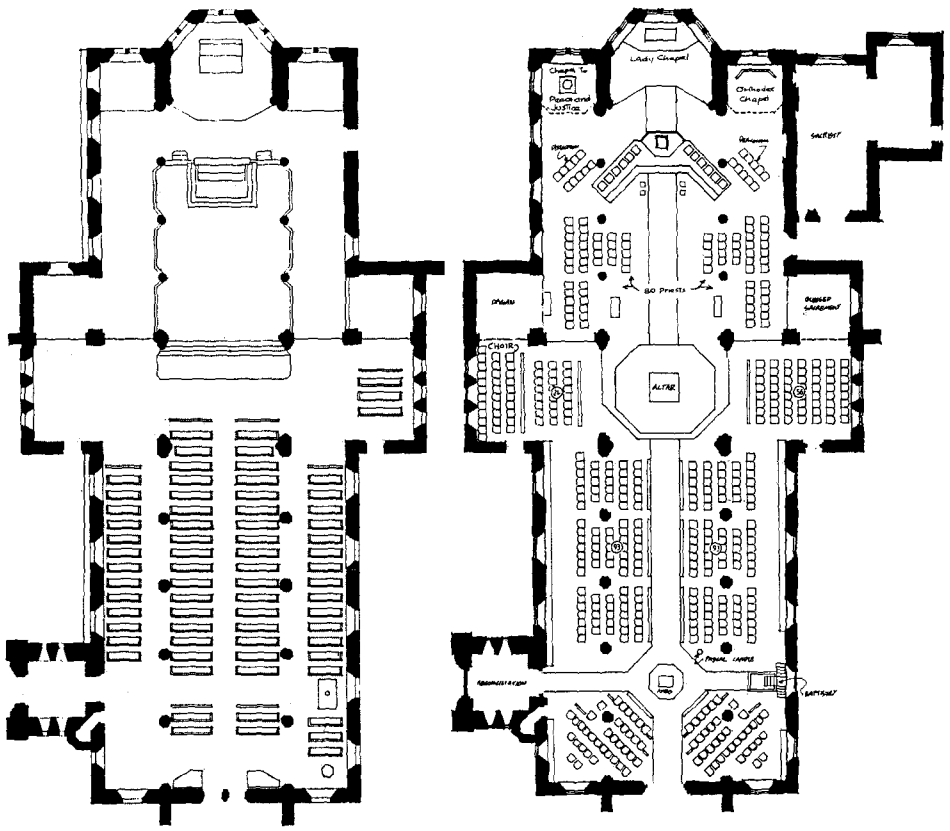


Kirsty Milne reports from Plymouth's Catholic cathedral, where plans to bring the mass to the people have met opposition—from the people themselves

Critical masses



Kristina Doggei

Plymouth cathedral now; and (right), how it might look after "re-ordering". Chairs replace pews; the altar moves forward; and the lectern is relocated at the opposite end of the nave

Morning mass in Plymouth's Catholic cathedral is said to the faint click of rosary beads. A trio of priests, in gold and green, kiss the altar in unison. A shaft of sunlight picks out a scatter of nuns. In the queue for communion, women clasp their hands and men hitch up their trousers awkwardly, before returning to the pews to pray. Silent devotions beat the air like birds in a crowded aviary.

But Catholics in the diocese of Plymouth are painfully at odds. Their bishop's proposal to "re-order" the cathedral is opposed by disaffected members of his flock. From Poole to Penzance, the bishop's wisdom has been called into question. His plans have been challenged in the pages of the *Catholic Herald*. A letter of protest has been sent to the Pope himself.

"We've told the Holy Father straight," says John Collins, a founder member of the new Friends of Plymouth Cathedral. "They're not just altering the building itself, they're trying to alter people's way of worshipping."

Yet the "re-ordering" scheme is not some unilateral whim of the bishop's. It is a perfectly orthodox attempt to catch up with the Second Vatican Council, which met to modernise Catholic thinking 30 years ago. Vatican II decreed that ordinary Catholics should be more involved in worship, with mass being celebrated *among* the people, rather than in front of them.

The practical response from Catholic churches was to move the altar forward, so the priest could face the congregation instead of turning his back on them. Some put chairs in a semi-circle round the altar, to bring priest and people closer together. "Re-ordering has been taking place throughout the country over the past 15 years," explains Father Tony Bennett, the bishop's cathedral spokesman.

But while re-ordering may be common, it is nonetheless controversial, often becoming a focus for anxiety about other alterations in the church since Vatican II, including the loss of the Latin Mass. "Re-ordering is one of the battlefronts between liberals and traditionalists," says Angus Macdonald of the *Catholic Herald*, who has covered similar disputes elsewhere. He sees Plymouth as the latest in a series of local tussles between a reforming hierarchy and a laity unhappy with change.

So the Right Reverend Christopher Budd must have known he was treading on eggshells when he announced plans for a new-look cathedral last March. With hindsight, Father Bennett concedes, "There was probably a problem of presentation. We weren't as sensitive as we might have been."

Plymouth cathedral is a discreet example of Victorian Gothic, with an etiolated grey spire that can be seen from the other side of the city. Pleasantly light inside, it has narrow white arches of painted limestone and pillars of pale grey Dartmoor granite. Under the re-ordering scheme, a new altar would be sited in the body of the church, at the intersection of the transepts and the nave. The traditional oak pews would be replaced by chairs, increasing seating capacity and allowing flexibility for different types of service. At the same time, the "ambo" or lectern would be moved away from the altar to the opposite end of the nave (see diagram), so that the congregation, sitting sideways on, would have the altar on one

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hand and the lectern on the other.

Such an arrangement is common in France, but unfamiliar in this country. For mass-goers, it raised the unappetising prospect of having to face one another across the altar. "More like a civic theatre than a church," complained one aggrieved worshipper. After the plans were unveiled, 375 people signed a petition opposing the changes, and 40 wrote letters of protest to the bishop. (To put these numbers in context, about 400 people go to cathedral mass on Sundays, and an estimated 20,000 attend mass in the diocese as a whole.)

The man at the eye of the storm is the cathedral administrator, Father Bartholomew Nannery, an Irish priest whose unfailing courtesy cannot veil his sense of humour. But eight months spent discussing Vatican II with unhappy parishioners have taken their toll. Over pork chops in the presbytery, he confesses to "liturgy fatigue".

A glance out of the window suggests other sources of strain. Father Nannery is trying to run a parish from a virtual building site, with cranes outside his door and drills vibrating during mass. For, as the clergy of the diocese like to remind you, the re-ordering is just one element in a £5-million package designed to improve the cathedral and the land adjoining it. A derelict convent, bombed during the war, is making way for flats and sheltered housing, built in partnership with housing associations and the city council. A community centre will be attached to the cathedral. The bishop himself will take up residence on the site, moving, as Father Nannery puts it, "from the leafy suburbs to the marketplace"—a charitable description of an inner-city area plagued by unemployment, drugs, and housing problems. (Six gold chalices were recently stolen from the cathedral.)

Father Nannery, dodging between architects' models and men in hard hats, regards the project as a laudable bid to modernise the church and anchor it more firmly in urban reality. But bishop and clergy reckoned without an assertive lay community—including a high proportion of naval personnel and Church of England converts—who wanted their views to be taken into account.

The lay rebellion has its headquarters on the other side of Plymouth, in a clifftop street of stuccoed villas. John Collins, a retired businessman, conducts operations from a living room adorned with photographs of Margaret Thatcher, John Major and the Pope. A convert of four years' standing, Collins was chairman of the parish council when re-ordering was first mooted. He tried unsuccessfully to get lay people appointed to the re-ordering committee. He visited Bishop Budd to explain that loyal Catholics resented the expense of removing the pews, disliked the modernising of a Victorian building, and were distressed at the prospect of being unable to face the altar, "looking towards God and all the symbols of God".

Some of these objections must have got through to the bishop, who arranged a series of meetings to explain the changes and defuse any objections. But his efforts backfired. Concerned Catholics were invited to a meeting with two psychotherapists, "to address their anger and fear", as the bishop put it. Unhappily, one of the psychotherapists turned out to be the wife of the Anglican bishop of Exeter—an ecumenical gesture to which Collins took "terrific exception".

Matters came to a head in August, when the parish council voted 9-3 to back the bishop. Collins, who felt his fellow-members had been unfairly pressurised, resigned as chairman, in company with the other dissenters. As the news spread, he began to get telephone calls from all over the diocese. "People were ringing me from Exeter and Torquay. They were saying, 'What's all this about the cathedral? We don't know anything about this.'"

The callers were lawyers and doctors, middle-class Catholics who give money to the church, and like to be kept informed. As Collins explains: "Vatican II decided there should be much greater involvement of lay people. So we don't expect to be treated like children." With a barrister, Stephen Lowry, he set up the Friends of Plymouth Cathedral, to lobby for the laity's views to be taken into account. "We don't want to disclose membership until it passes the 1,000 mark," says Collins, "but we have coordinators recruiting all over the diocese."

Father Tony Bennett maintains that opposition is confined to a vociferous minority. "These are people who don't like what's been happening since Vatican II, and feel the church should not be changing. Some would even prefer the mass to be said in Latin again. But the vast majority are content to allow the bishop and priests to lead them in worship—and some cathedral parishioners have been unhappy at being portrayed as opposed to their bishop."

Father Bennett describes Bishop Budd as "immensely popular and easy-going", adding, "If anything, he has been criticised for spending too much time talking to people, and not enough time making decisions." (One clue to the bishop's style lies in Collins' complaint that he has been observed "getting on trains in an old anorak".)

Bishop Budd's final decision on the re-ordering is expected soon. He may have revised his plans in the light of lay protests; or he may not. Father Bennett stresses that ultimate authority rests with the bishop, "as the successor of the apostles, ordained through the power of the Holy Spirit".

John Collins hopes for compromise. But if none is forthcoming, the Friends will use delaying tactics by appealing to the Archbishop of Southwark, as is their right under canon law. "We'll carry on," he promises. "Even if they actually start work, we'll go through all the procedures we can."

Angus Macdonald of the *Catholic Herald*, who has covered the controversy from the start, thinks Bishop Budd has been genuninely shocked by the strength of feeling in the diocese. Macdonald sees the rumpus in Plymouth as an index of change. "The church used to be incredibly hierarchical. You did what your bishop told you without question.

"But we've seen a big movement in England and Wales towards more lay involvement. There's a shortage of priests, so there are lots of jobs for committed lay people to do. 'Collaborative ministry' has become the catchphrase of the day."

"The response from some ordinary Catholics, like those in Plymouth, has been: 'You want our help—why won't you listen to us?'"

INFLUENCES

GEORGE ROBERTSON QC
Shadow secretary of state for Scotland

What books and authors have had the greatest influence on your political beliefs?
John Steinbeck in general, and his *Grapes of Wrath* in particular; Robert Tressel; *Point of Departure* by James Cameron; *James Maxton, Beloved Rebel* by John McNair; Graham Greene; *Para Handy and Other Tales* by Neil Munro; *Elmer Gantry* by Sinclair Lewis; *Raging Calm* by Stan Barstow; *All Those in Favour?—The ETU Trial* by C H Rolph.

Name one film, one book, one play, one poem, and one song or piece of music that you would most like everyone to see, read or hear.
Film: *A Man for all Seasons* directed by Fred Zinnemann.
Book: *Catch 22* by Joseph Heller.
Play: *Richard III*.
Poem: "To a mouse", by Robert Burns.
Music: Beethoven's 6th Symphony, the *Pastoral*.

In the early stages of your life, which figures stand out as an important influence on you?
My parents; my uncle Pat Robertson, headmaster of Rockfield Primary School, Oban; my history teacher at Donoon Grammar School, Archie Blair.

What event during your lifetime has had the greatest effect on your political beliefs?
The Vietnam war—as with so many of my generation, it sucked us into politics and forced us to do more than just agonise.

Which political figure—living or dead—do you most admire?
Clement Attlee, whose quiet achievements live on and on; and Martin Luther King, a genuine inspiration.

If you could visit any time in history for 24 hours, which would you choose?
I would like to have been in Berlin on the night that the Berlin wall was breached; the cold war was over, and the future was in new hands.

What do you consider the greatest threat at present to individual freedom and liberty?
The relentless rise in crime.

On important matters, whose opinion—other than your own—do you trust most?
The opinions of Sandra Robertson, Donald Dewar, Gavin Laird, Giles Radice, and Ken Woolmer.

Who is the greatest prime minister we never had?
Denis Healey—having served as his deputy, I know that it would have been a rough ride, but it would have been exciting, invigorating and good for Labour and Britain.

If you could pass one law, what would it be?
To make the teaching of two languages compulsory at the start of primary education. Britain's place in the world is severely compromised by our inability to communicate fully with other people unless they learn English.

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Stuart Hall was one of those who named the beast of Thatcherism in the 1980s. The beast is still with us under John Major, he says

Thatcherism today

I spent a lot of time analysing Thatcherism in the 1980s, so she and I spent a lot of symbolic time together. It was a question of judging the nature of the beast we had named. The difficulty arose because there were always tactical issues that came up daily. There were the pragmatics of maintaining political support in the country and in parliament, of winning support for particular measures, and of backing off when the support did not seem to be there. Those were the tactics of the political game, which cannot be neglected. But in trying to define Thatcherism as a political project, one had to take a longer political perspective. Then, as now, we had to get the balance between the tactical and strategic conjuncture and the long-term historical. This is where the art of political analysis rests.

The recent spate of TV programmes about Thatcher led me to ask the inevitable question about individuals and historical movements. I spent 14 years saying, "Of course Thatcherism is not Mrs Thatcher." But then I began to wonder whether it wasn't really exactly that—the convergence of the moment when some lone individual arises perfectly embodying a political moment. So there is a kind of "fit" between the public figure and the private persona, between what appear to be privately held values and a public philosophy. This fit is very important in securing identification, which is one of the things about Thatcherism that is most significant.

Another element that was extremely interesting in those programmes was the degree to which Thatcher saw herself as engaged in a deep struggle with her own colleagues. There were two fights going on—the public fight, and the fight in the heart of the cabinet itself to find what she called true converts. You heard there pure conviction politics, a kind of new model army engaged in a long-term project, and a profound conviction that she was to be the instrument to bring it into existence. We haven't had many politicians like that on the left for a long time, people with an inner conviction that what they feel instinctively is in tune with the political moment they can create out there. That reciprocity cannot be created by recipe, but when it happens the convergence is immensely powerful. It doesn't mean that individuals make history in some simple-minded way, but it does mean that it is a very difficult project to dislodge when that kind of identification is going on.

Today, we face the spectacle of a government without authority, apparently without direction, with very few ideas, with very little charismatic hold in mobilising its own supporters, and profoundly divided in its soul. It is not simply that we are in the period between elections, but that we are seeing the last stages of a government that is unwinding itself. It is not in any sense a government at the crest of its political confidence and power. It has, in sum, no hegemonic project of its own.

It was surprising at the time of the election how relatively successful Major was in fronting a kind of alternative to Thatcherism—Thatcherism with a human face—which represented no profound political philosophical investment of his own. Despite that, there was a kind of coup at the party conference, a resurgence of those true converts, an attempt to restore the momentum of the social revolution that Thatcherism had put in train.

And that is what is currently setting the social and political agenda, at least in so far as the government is able to set an agenda of any kind. Because there is no authentic language of Majorism, as there was an authentic language of Thatcherism, when in difficulties in mobilising political support, Major is driven back to the old themes of the Thatcherite project, in order to fill the void. He reaches for the popular themes of crime, family breakdown and social disintegration that constitute Thatcherite "common sense", or a version of it that he calls "Back to Basics". In doing so, he is attempting to combine the impossible—respectability and enterprise.

Many people have warned of the impossibility of this objective, pointing out that if you drive the notion of enterprise far enough, you undermine any sense of tradition, of organic belongingness to society. To some extent that has indeed happened. In spite of the attempt of the right to lay the blame on the 1960s and the left, it is in fact the right that is responsible for the breakdown of the social fabric.

That breakdown is, of course, to do with resources and disadvantaged groups. But it is to do with something else too: the diminution of the possibility to evoke any responsibility that we might have for one another. And there is only one political and moral force that has been in the business over 14 years of eating away at the cement of social reciprocity. The name of that beast is the Thatcherite project.

It is not just Conservatism, and certainly not the old Conservativism. Old Conservatives don't believe in the same forms of reciprocity as the left, but they know what reciprocity is. In the Highlands, where people tug their forelocks and say, "Good morning Mr whoever-it-is, how is master feeling today?", there is a kind of reciprocity. It's not mine, it doesn't belong in the 20th century. But if you say reciprocity to some of those lords who can hardly get to the House of Lords, they sort of know what you mean. If you say reciprocity to the hard-faced men who are the leading edge of the restoration of the Thatcherite project, however, they don't know what you are talking about. They have never heard of it, they don't know how to cost it. The concept has been eroded; and that is the result of a systematic set of practices and ideologies.

Sometimes when we paid attention to Thatcherite ideas and philosophies in the 1980s, people said we were exaggerating the ideological thrust. That is because the left has never properly understood what ideologies are. Ideologies are ideas that organise people's behaviour and conduct. You can't make any distinction half the time between the philosophies through which people understand the world, and the practices through which they operate in it. And the philosophy at the heart of the Thatcherite project involves refuting the idea that individuals should order their own interests and drives to take account

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of the existence of others in society.

The queen's speech was an event of terminal boredom. But in its own regal way it sustained the tentative shift that began at the Tory party conference and is represented by John Major's "Back to Basics". It also formally let off the leash that Home Office rottweiler, Michael Howard.

The queen unveiled the most ferocious package in the law-and-order arena. This precedes the new-style budget next Tuesday. Chancellor Clarke faces a deficit that is not only a serious sign of the failure of Thatcherism to resolve the problem of a backward and declining British economy; it also, much more dangerously, provides the excuse for the resumption of the dismantling of the welfare state. The budget will use the deficit to redistribute the effects of economic decline among the people who can bear it least. At the same time it will, ideologically, provide the opening to signal the end of the welfare epoch.

We spoke in the past of Thatcherism as constituting a social regime, a sort of social revolution. It wasn't a phrase that went down very well on the left—revolution belonged to us, not to them—and people used to ask what we meant by the notion that it was a project: "Well, where did the five of them get together? Beneath what smoke-filled canopy did they put this idea together?" A project had to be something plotted, a conspiracy.

Gramsci always said that the left tends to swing wildly between optimism—being just about to march around the walls, blow the trumpet seven times and the walls will collapse—or it is plunged into pessimism. One of the effects of political pessimism is to imagine that everything is a political conspiracy, and that everyone is a political dupe. Far be it from me to say that political conspiracies don't exist. Nevertheless, when we talked about the Thatcherite project, that was not what we meant. We meant that there was a certain distinctive set of practices, ideas and institutional reforms, which constituted a very important new way of thinking about how rules and processes, norms and habits, could be inculcated and regulations put in place that would alter the conduct of others.

One of the key lessons I learned from Thatcherism was that first of all you struggle about conduct, and hearts and minds follow later. I learnt that through the institution in which I work, the Open University. It is filled with good social democrats. Everybody there believes in the redistribution of educational opportunities and seeks to remedy the exclusiveness of British education. And yet, in the past ten years, these good social-democratic souls, without changing for a minute what is in their hearts and minds, have learned to speak a brand of metallic new entrepreneurialism, a new managerialism of a horrendously closed nature. They believe what they always believed, but what they do, how they write their mission statements, how they do appraisal forms, how they talk about students, how they calculate the cost—that's what they are really interested in now. The result is that the institution has been transformed.

When one says "market forces", people usually think you are talking about pure economics. But market forces are more than just that. The right thinks of market forces in the way the left used to think of class struggle: it is a broad principle of life. When I was a student and they were trying to recruit me to the Communist Party (they weren't successful), I used to go to meetings in Balliol, Oxford, and the first item—usually the only item—on the agenda was the political report. Those who gave this report were able to link a small dispute in one bus garage to the entire struggle in Kenya or Cyprus, or the political balance of forces worldwide. There was a seamless web, not a crack ever appeared, as they moved from one level to another, until the whole universe was encapsulated.

The right thinks of market forces in the way the left used to think of the class struggle

I remember a friend at this time saying, "I'm having trouble with an essay", and another replying, "Try reading Marx." It wasn't a question of Marx having said something about this that might be useful. Just as the left talked about class struggle, so the right does market forces. And it has to do with the culture of institutions as well as with economics.

The left is very good at pinpointing the problems of bureaucracy, but there is something to be said about bureaucracy because at least it marks certain divisions between public and private. People know their role in the organisation they work for; when they go home at night they can leave it behind. The new entrepreneurial ethos does not have any such boundaries. You have to take the whole organisation home every night, go to bed thinking about it, wake up at 7am and ask: "Why aren't I at work?" Now there is no bureaucratic norm—there is flexitime. You should have been there an hour before you woke up and you should be leaving an hour after you should be leaving! That is the production of a new kind of subject, who think about themselves in relation to the organisation in a different way, internalising many of its norms. That drive has been going on above all in the public sector.

It has, of course, been happening in the private sector too, with the restoration of the managerial prerogative. A whole managerial philosophy has been generated in which the principal objective is to bear down on costs. This means bearing down on labour, and increasing the degree of mental and manual exploitation. We know about the economics but what we don't very often see is precisely how the language in which we address ourselves is changing. Now we are all customers. We are all going to mimic the market.

When we talk about the NHS, for example, we are compelled to think in the language of privatisation. The NHS is still going to be publicly funded, says the right, so what do you mean by privatisation? What we mean is that there is not to be any other institutional logic operating but the market one, and if you can't actually have a market you must mimic that relationship because no other way of measuring what is good, or what needs might be, is to be allowed into the institution.

If you can close off the institution ideologically like that, you can transform the public sector, which, for all its faults, is the one sector of society that has institutionalised certain other criteria of measurement. The public sector did have a universalistic way of calculating needs, it did attempt to de-commodify certain relationships. When the right decided to transform it, it was not necessarily that they wanted all of it to be privatised literally, but they wanted it to be submitted to the institutional logic of the market. It is only to be worked, operated, regulated and disciplined in the ways that markets do. Those of us who work in it must, for the purposes of running that system, become enterprising subjects, whatever other social democratic ideas we might keep in the back of our heads. That capacity for the transformation of social and institutional relationships is what I mean by a regime. That is what has been going on in the past 14 years, and the drive is as powerful under Major as it was under Thatcher.

During the 14 years of Thatcherism to date we have seen occasions when things have seemed worse, but the combination of the public spending deficit and the inevitable long-term increasing cost of delivering social services provides the opportunity for another aspect of the Thatcherite project, not just to erode or undermine the welfare state, but to bring the epoch of what has been known as welfare capitalism to an end. That is what thinking the unthinkable in the social arena actually consists of. And when that happens, those issues that are not easy to slot into an economic framework inevitably come to the fore.

These issues don't immediately deliver answers in economic terms, but they touch on very profound questions of political identity. They raise questions about the family, crime, property, violence and children. You see the profound dissertation of these questions in recent months. And it has been unlike other moral panics where these questions have surfaced as convenient forms through which to mobilise the backwoodspersons of the Tory conference around the cry for retribution.

What we are seeing now goes much deeper than that. We are staring into the face of what happens when the market principle is driven to its ultimate limit. And the response of the left cannot simply be that this is a convenient scapegoat theme drawn up by the right to scare people in their beds. It cannot be our case that in a society where social reciprocity has been under sustained attack, social upheaval and dislocation will not inevitably follow.

The question of crime is a convenient catch-all, a box into which to gather many other things. Property crime, in a period of severe unemployment, is a form of rational behaviour, which I would expect those addicted to the market principle to see as a perfectly understandable, rational economic choice. I don't think it is a good thing, but in a period such as we have been through, it does not appear to be a mystery why lots of young

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people do commit property crime.

There are nevertheless many other forms of violent crime that do not fall into that category and that clearly point to serious problems in the very fabric of social relationships. They involve young men without a sense of purpose, without any way of regulating themselves in relation to wider social needs. They are not covered by networks, or are only part of networks that have fractured, or communities that have broken down.

This is all extremely dangerous territory. If you take, for example, the question of the family, one of the root problems why we find it so difficult to enter this debate is because our conception of families, of social belongingness itself, is cast in such a rigorously traditional framework. Once we say that of course we need order, of course people need to be knitted together through communities, our image of what that means for how men and women relate to one another finds us colluding in pushing them back into how it has always been done.

We don't have alternative means by which adults can benefit from the ways in which people have released themselves from the bonds of traditionalist forms of living and thinking, and still exert responsibilities for others in a free and open way. We have no notion of democratic citizenship in that sense. The left is terrified of entering this debate because there only seems to be one space in which it can enter—in collusion with the view that perhaps, after all, only two people can bring up children. We are being asked to forget the misery that many have lived through when two people stay together "for the sake of the children". Yet at the same time the answer can't simply be that we are all free individuals and can look after ourselves.

These themes are so thin, so undernourished in the thinking on the left, that I am ashamed at the level of that debate, at how weak our alternatives are, the models of parenting and of how children should grow. I am ashamed at the diminution of our capacity to think of the varieties of socially sustained groups in which human beings can live; and of our failure to invent new forms that sustain their micro-relationships in a civilised way, and yet not in a way which confines people.

This leads on to the question of racism. In an ancient imperial society like ours, the forces that nourished racism are deep, endemic and recurring, and show no sign of abating. That terrible moment recently when we woke up to find that the official form of the liberal democratic process had seen a fascist elected in the Isle of Dogs brought home the brutal reality of a community that was expunged and an area flattened to give rise to that monument to Thatcherism, Canary Wharf—this fetishistic totem that can't even rent itself. In one small area an abandoned white population is left. Then, it is into this cauldron that you drop some Bangladeshis.

How difficult it is to tell the story of why Canary Wharf is there, and what happened to those old communities. It is so much easier to blame the blacks. But when we look at the social consequences of trying to drive through the market principle, in terms of social disorganisation or in unleashing attitudes of violence, or in a lack of care, sensitivity or respect for human beings, the abolition of social reciprocity as an organising principle of life, the outcome is inevitable. If you try to organise society entirely according to market forces, you dismantle all those intricate, complex ties that make it possible for a society of different people to function together. It may be difficult to identify, in the immediate political sense, what one does now, how one tries to mobilise people, but the longer historical task to try to roll back and transform the Thatcherite project can only be achieved if it addresses the immediate questions of bringing people together in order to protect and defend the remnants of the public philosophy that has been under such sustained attack.

However, a notion of sharing and equality, which is at the centre of any democratic project, must not fall into the conventional groove of the old defensive politics. There are much more imaginative and creative ways of understanding the new terrain of putting together constituencies, people and interests that have not been in the same room before.

We have thought a good deal about getting rid of what seems to have held us back, but we have not yet thought about how we can construct a new set of relationships. Consider the position of voluntary organisations and political parties. Voluntary organisations, many of which are into extremely important social questions but don't have the same kind of political representative function as political parties, have increased their support and membership over the last decade, while the formal political parties have declined. You can't say, therefore, that this a society that doesn't involve itself, that doesn't want to play an active part in issues which touch the public realm, that it's not a joining society.

So the notion of coming into the public realm in a way that attaches people to an organisation, and begins to open that dialogue between represented and those who represent can still be structured in the modern world. This is the critical relationship of political representation, without which the function of political parties will inevitably decline. Like the nation state, parties don't disappear, they just lumber around the stage, able to do less and less, a kind of encumbrance, like giant dinosaurs. Sometimes one thinks they have lasted beyond their time. They don't organise anybody, they don't mobilise anybody.

Have political parties lasted beyond their time? They don't organise anybody, they don't mobilise anybody

How many of us have wondered how the privatisation of rail could be so profoundly unpopular without a popular movement opposing privatisation? There is no movement of the millions of people who know in their bones that it is nonsense, that they will not get a better system, and that the questions of service, economic efficiency, safety and so on cannot be dealt with through the private solution. It should not have been beyond the capacity of a party to lead a public campaign, not only among its own supporters. The possibility exists for bringing people together across the traditional social-economic divisions, because all the public services now under threat cut across existing class, regional and other divisions. It is not impossible to organise a public mobilisation that would—well, what would it do? Encourage the Lords to vote against another time? I'm prepared to do that. It would also remind us of what it is like to belong to a successful campaign.

What is remarkable is that rail privatisation is going to happen, even though everything is against it except the narrow purchase of a tiny majority in parliament. In all other terms, the government lost the argument long ago, and to lose that argument is potentially to lose the whole argument about the nature of the social. If they cannot carry it in rail, nor in education or the NHS, they cannot carry it as a general principle of life.

The failure of the left is the failure to rethink the relationship between a party and the people, and the very narrow conception by the party *of* the people—in my view a conception that is much too narrowly directed to who is in active relationship to us, not a sense of the people as a possible mobilising force who can be appealed to on a particular issue and therefore won to a larger philosophical perception of why the public sector matters. This is a notion of politics as the slow rebuilding of constituencies. What characterises society today is diversity, the narrowing and fragmentation of old constituencies, so that the only political game in town is the construction of new political majorities across and between constituencies that, in their social, gender, class, economic and class interests, are different from one another. This is what Gramsci called the construction of a collective will, with the function of the party above all being to generalise the civic or local lesson to a wider social philosophy.

There is a whole tier of activities going on throughout Britain outside formal political structures. That is the thin blue line between us and barbarism. There are many people who are involved. What at the moment they cannot do is to come together to constitute that larger vision of society. What could be the agent, what could be the political forms in which their different projects are stitched together into something that looks like an alternative to the whole way of life that Thatcherism has been offering us and failing to establish?

Only a vision of that breadth, of that profundity, which has a political programme and economic rationale, but is also able to provide alternative models for how we live with one another, how we deal with difference, how we constitute relationships among ourselves, will provide a sufficiently powerful countervailing alternative to the powerful historical base on which the "back to basics" populism of Major and the Tories is founded.

Stuart Hall is professor of sociology at the Open University. This article is based on a lecture given last Friday at Democratic Left's "Moving On" event, sponsored by NSS and Pluto Press

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Does John Major need a Willie? An older statesman might help him to resist his cabinet's raving right wingers, writes **Ian Aitken**

Reining in the right

I doubt if many witnesses recall it now, but a minor incident during the 1979 general election stuck in my memory at the time. It happened during one of Mrs Thatcher's daily press conferences, and involved a well-known middle European freelance journalist who worked for a number of West German newspapers and radio stations. A persistent, nagging figure, he was heartily disliked by most of the resident hacks—which may explain what happened.

Mrs T had been rabbitting on in her customary way about all the spending that was going to be cut under her approaching premiership, and how the unions would simply inflict unemployment on their members if they sought to buck the monetary restraints she intended to impose. Then the West German correspondent, who always sat in the front row, rose to put in a question.

"Mrs Thatcher," he said, in the peculiarly grating German accent that made us all wince, "if you propose to do all zeese things, what are you goink to do to strengthen zee police and zee armed forces? Because I tell you, you are goink to need zem."

The question was met with a gust of jeering laughter from the assembled British hacks, and it was some time before the future prime minister was able to reply. When she did, she simply waved her arms at the giggling audience and said something like, "I think you have your answer."

But of course, the supposed outsider was right and the sycophantic resident reporters were wrong. What is more, Thatcher knew it all too well. Not long after she took office, she began preparations for her showdown with the miners, first by piling up coal stocks and second by buttering up the military and heaping pay increases on the police.

And it worked. By the time Arthur Scargill took up the challenge thrown down by the government, Thatcher had a police force she could rely on to do her dirty work without demur, and a military that could be expected to come to the aid of the civil power if it was needed. Just as the coal mountains heaped outside the power stations were essential to the defeat of King Arthur, so were the bulging pay packets of the coppers.

All of which goes to prove that, however oddly she may be behaving now, Thatcher was no loony rightie in her early Downing Street years. She knew what she wanted to do, and although it was frighteningly right wing, there was nothing remotely crazy about the way she set about achieving it. Apart from the monumental lapse of the poll tax—which came rather later—she was always careful not to overdo her calculated gambles.

Nothing of the sort can be said about her successor—or at any rate, of the people he has allowed to get their hands on the key levers of power in his cabinet. Not only is their brand of 19th-century liberalism even more divorced from reality that hers ever was, they seem also to have forgotten the lessons taught by Thatcher's victory over the miners.

To be sure, John Major's nightmarish Home Secretary did eventually listen to the cries of rage and anguish emanating from the police service over the Sheehy Report. After a shaky start, Michael Howard backed down over some of its more controversial recommendations, such as fixed contracts and crude payment by results.

But it turns out that he was only retreating on one front in order to advance on another. His letter to the independent chairman of the Police Negotiating Board, exposed last Sunday in the *Observer*, reveals that he is still determined to cut police pay, principally by abolishing overtime payments. He has made it clear that any settlement the negotiators may reach will simply be vetoed if it exceeds strict cash limits laid down by him.

Thatcher was no loony rightie in her early years. She was careful not to overdo her calculated gambles

This comes at a time when Howard's colleagues are pushing through a hodgepodge of privatisation proposals so far-fetched that only the semi-disbelief of the public has so far prevented an explosion of anger. It isn't just the railways (including the royal train!) and chunks of the prison service. Also on the block are parts of the social security system, including a plan to bribe the better-off into opting out of unemployment insurance and the state pension.

No wonder Major says he often has visions of men in white coats, for the chaps from the funny farm should be bursting through the doors of the cabinet room quite soon. The abiding puzzle of the past year, as Sir Edward Heath constantly points out, is why a Prime Minister who seems outwardly sane as well as rather ordinary has felt it necessary to give free rein to the very small minority of outright loonies on the far right.

But the essential point about all this is that a government set on such a course cannot afford to alienate the people it may have to rely on if the going gets rough. Nor are these essential people restricted to the police and the armed forces. They include another core element in the state apparatus whose members are currently being treated with contempt by ministers—the civil service.

Vernon Bogdanor, whose newspaper writings now place him among the most impressive of the journalist-dons, recently exposed the extent to which the upper reaches of the civil service are now being systematically politicised by the Major government. Not only are large segments of established civil service activities being hived off to a plethora of "independent" quangos; many of the most senior Whitehall posts are being transformed into temporary appointments under contract.

The outcome, says Bogdanor, will be an end to the impartiality that is the unique feature of our system of public administration, and its replacement by an American-style "spoils system" in which most important government jobs are up for grabs whenever a new party takes office. Ministers who formerly got honest, if sometimes unwelcome, advice from career civil servants will eventually receive tainted advice from their own loyal hirelings.

But that, no doubt, is exactly what the loony right now wants if it is to sustain its plan to take Britain back to the 18th century. The only danger for them is that the process of implementing it is alienating the civil service to an unprecedented degree. In my 30 years' experience as a journalist around Westminster and Whitehall, I have never known a time when so much highly sensitive material is routinely leaked by government officials.

And thank God for that, I hear you say, because disclosure is rapidly becoming our last effective weapon against this impenetrable government. I agree. But it is also a dangerous development for a future government—and that might even be a Labour one some day.

In the meantime, it doesn't look as if Lady Thatcher is in any mood to offer helpful tactical advice to her successor, even if he would accept it. But many of his colleagues are convinced that he is heading for serious trouble if he doesn't quickly rein in Messrs Howard, Portillo, Lilley and Redwood. Recalling that most basic rule of the Thatcherite creed, "every Prime Minister needs a Willie", he could do a lot worse than send for Viscount Whitelaw first thing Monday morning.

Margaret Thatcher in 1979

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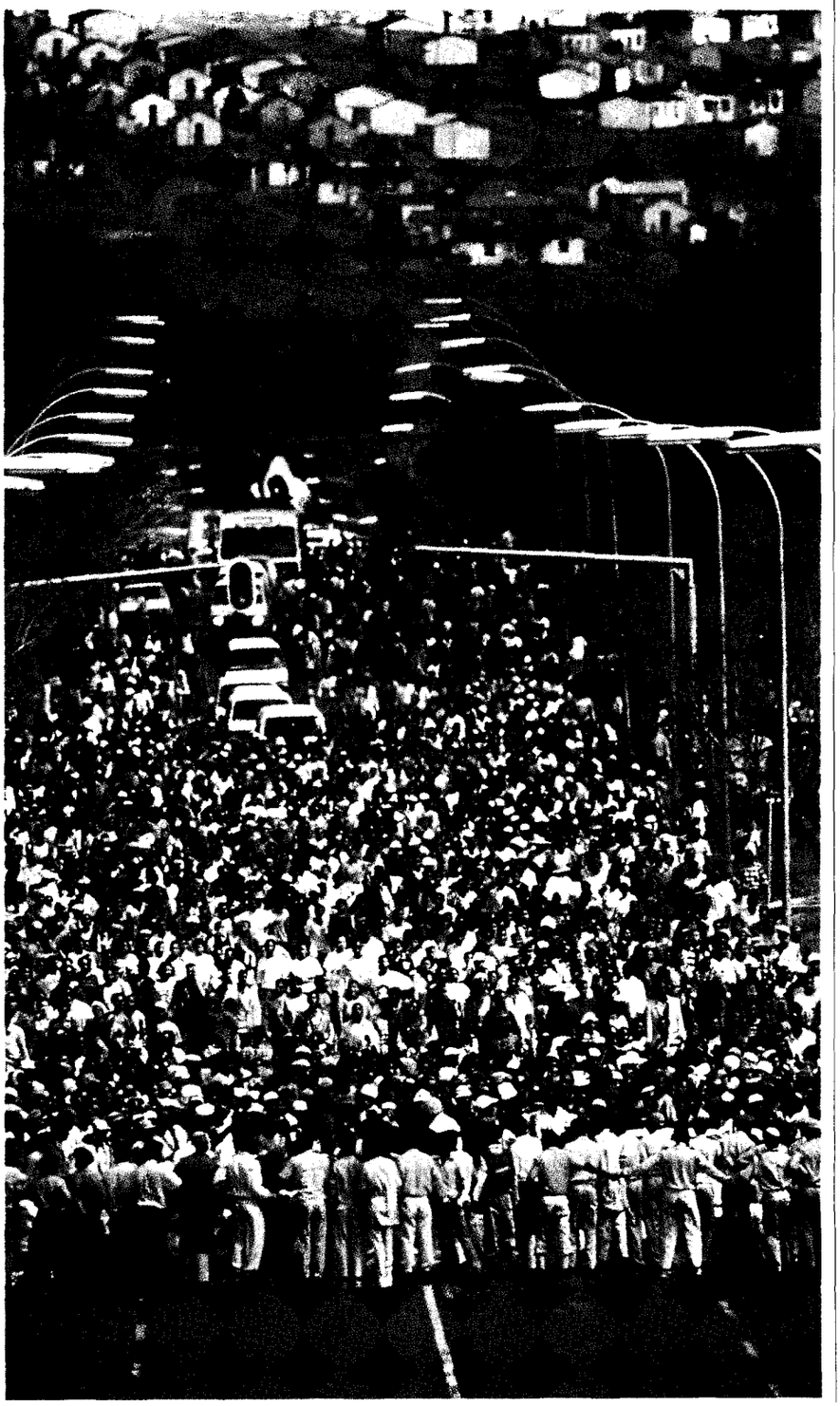
As South Africa prepares for a new future, Brigadier Gqozo, the leader of Ciskei, one of apartheid's old homelands, is on trial for murder. **Tom Carver** reports

Bringing down the butcher of Bisho



Network

Brigadier Oupa Joshua Gqozo, black leader of South Africa's Ciskei homeland, recently shared with a group of businessmen his vision of the future: "I want to ask you to use your imagination. We are going forward in time to the year 1998, and you are listening to a CBS broadcast from their Africa correspondent.

"'Reports from the Socialist Republic of Azania are still sketchy, but it seems that the newly installed president, Cyril Ramaphosa, is continuing the purge which started before the sudden death of President Mandela. As far as we can tell, several thousand "reactionary dissidents", as the government calls them, have been rounded up and transported to camps.

"'Our South African correspondent managed to get a brief interview with ex-president F W de Klerk on his luxury farm in Argentina. De Klerk said he regretted what had happened, but realised with hindsight that he had underestimated the cunning duplicity of the communists who controlled the ANC. This is Jo Bloggs signing off for CBS news.'"

As this imaginative speech suggests, Brigadier Gqozo is a product of the old South Africa. Reared in the ranks of the South African defence force, he was taught to believe, like his white colleagues, that the ANC were communist terrorists who must be stopped at all costs.

He is still faithfully reciting the old mantras today. But those who taught him, the Nationalist Party government, have slipped from his side. While they are busy stitching themselves into the fabric of a new South Africa, the brigadier, abandoned by his powerful friends, has ended up on trial for murder in his own supreme court.

As the head of one of South Africa's four black homelands, Brigadier Gqozo has good reason to fear the onset of an ANC government. The ANC—and now the Nationalist government—want Ciskei and the other three homelands (Transkei, Bophuthatswana and Venda) reincorporated into South Africa as soon as possible. But Gqozo has refused to take part in negotiations over the political future of South Africa. Earlier this year, he took Ciskei into the Freedom Alliance, an umbrella group that includes the white right wing, Chief Buthelezi's Inkatha party, and the homeland of Bophuthatswana.

Brigadier Gqozo's visceral mistrust of the ANC surfaced last year, when he ordered his troops to open fire on ANC demonstrators attempting to canvass support in his tiny statelet. Twenty-nine were killed, in what has become known as the Bisho massacre.

Ciskei is haunted by the Kafkaesque doctrines that once obsessed the South African government. It came into being overnight in 1981, on a huge area of open veldt in the south of the country. One day, the million people living there were South Africans; the next, they awoke to find themselves Ciskeians. Driving towards Bisho in a tropical rain storm, the capital looks lonelier than ever. You come upon it by surprise. On a treeless hill stands a modern hotel, and a shopping complex dressed up with curious stone statues of mythical animals. Further along the road are the courthouse (where the brigadier now stands accused of murder), the radio station, and the council-of-state buildings.

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Then, suddenly, you are in open countryside again. Look to the left, and in the valley is what seems like a vast prison complex, surrounded by barbed wire and guards. That's where the homeland's government officials live.

Glossy government leaflets on Ciskei conjure up a rural African idyll, brought into existence by the people's desire for self-determination. "Whenever there is a major decision to be taken on the future of the nation," it informs you, "the Ciskeians gather spontaneously at the foot of Ntaba-kaNdoda [a hill] to take the decision in concert."

It may be easy to mock South Africa's homelands, but it's important to remember just what a gigantic con trick apartheid was, for it will be forgotten soon enough. In reality, the Ciskeians had no more say in their politics than any other blacks. But for years, white South Africans genuinely believed the rubbish that they read; they believed it because they wanted to believe it. They wanted to think that tucked away in these homelands were millions of blacks, happily puffing on their pipes, thanking their lucky stars they did not have to live in nasty cities with the whites. They wanted to believe that these homelands were genuine states with their own parliaments and factories, taxes and laws. In that way, white South Africans could salve their consciences; they wanted to believe apartheid's slogan, "Separate, but equal".

The press officer for the Ciskei government, Cedric Harrop, is English. It was he who gave me a copy of the brigadier's futuristic speech. "No doubt you've talked to that bunch of crypto-communists, the ANC," he muttered. He came out to South Africa in 1980 with his wife, after giving up his job as a pharmacist in Maidenhead. He was once vice-chairman of the Windsor Conservative Party.

I think Ciskei should be preserved as it is, to remind people of what a homeland was like. The South African ambassador to Ciskei, Piet Goosen, doesn't agree. I met him as he was working out his last days in the post. Now that the emperor has been found to have no clothes, he is deeply embarrassed and wants to get out as fast as possible. He is full of the rhetoric of the new South Africa, and keeps trying to talk about the future. I am more interested in the past.

The South African embassy is not even in Ciskei: it's in the old Bantu affairs offices in King William's Town, the biggest town in the area. The whites living there held a referendum at the time of Ciskei's "independence"; not surprisingly, they voted overwhelmingly to stay firmly in South Africa.

Ambassador Goosen describes the homelands policy as a failed experiment. "The homelands must be reincorporated as soon as possible. We sincerely hope that Brigadier Gqozo will acquiesce," he says. But there's the rub. Having been set afloat, some of these artificial creations are showing a marked reluctance to return to shore.

The brigadier became leader of Ciskei after heading a military coup in 1990, three months after Nelson Mandela was released from jail. Everyone agrees that, at first, he was remarkably enlightened. He signed a Bill of Rights drawn up by a liberal lawyer, took 15 prisoners off death row, and even gave the ANC the use of Ciskei's only stadium. But this proved only a brief aberration. Within months, he was acting like a military dictator, aggrandising his power, banning political marches, and eliminating his enemies.

In January 1991, South African military intelligence tipped him off that Charles Sebe, ousted head of Ciskei's tiny defence force, was plotting a comeback. The brigadier was advised to lure Sebe back inside Ciskei, where it would be easier to get rid of him. On the night of 28 January 1991, Charles Sebe was shot dead. He'd been ambushed at a roadblock just inside Ciskei.

The evidence supporting the brigadier's part in the murder is strong. I have a tape-recording of an interview the Brigadier gave to a local newspaper, a week after Sebe's death at the hands of Ciskeian soldiers. In it, the interviewer says: "You are on record as having given the order to kill," and Gqozo replies: "Ja, I said search and destroy when you find him, so they did exactly that . . . When they got him they didn't want to ask questions . . . they shot him. " Interviewer: "So even if he came out there with nothing [no weapons] they would still have killed him?" Gqozo: "They would have shot him, that's for sure. That is operational instructions, they would have shot him. We feel we have rid the world of a scum in Charles Sebe."

This is the arrogance of a man taught to believe he was above the law. But he miscalculated the period he was living in. By the time Sebe was killed, the homelands were becoming an embarrassment for a Pretoria already planning the new South Africa. No one came to Gqozo's rescue. Now, with poetic justice, he is being tried under the liberal constitution that he naively approved in the first days of his coup.

There is not much room in the supreme court in Bisho. Journalists sit on a bench, squashed alongside the defence counsel. The lawyers, including the judge, are all white, seconded from South Africa's legal circuit. The brigadier—a small man, still in his 30s—sits slumped in the dock, seemingly indifferent to his fate. Fortunately for him, this will probably be a jail sentence, since he abolished the death penalty himself.

The trial is likely to be over within a month. If Gqozo is convicted, Ciskei's demise will be even quicker than its creation. But even if he's acquitted, and tries to stop the homeland being reincorporated into South Africa, Gqozo must know he would not last a day. The local South African army garrison in King William's Town is bigger than the entire Ciskei defence force.

Behind the brigadier, a row of black bodyguards are competing with each other to pass their master a glass of water. Behind them sit the people, row upon row of silent black faces. By their stares, they have condemned him already. I wonder if they are thinking about the real architects of apartheid who put him there: and I think about President de Klerk, escaping to his Argentinian farm.

Tom Carver is a BBC correspondent in southern Africa

Next week: former ANC guerrilla Ronnie Kasrils describes the march on Ciskei

Put a Cork In It

While the government is alleged to be ready to axe unemployment benefit after six months, the "Sunday Times" reports that City employers are trying to play down news of Yuletide bonuses running into six figures

Oh history's helpfully shown us
How flat may be fizz in shampoo,
What terrible onus
A six-figure bonus
Imposes on all of our crew.

For profits, although they are stellar,
And mega, bonanza, and ace,
Don't mean we shall shell a
Few bob on a cellar
Nor even lash out on a case.

We *must* show respect to the needy,
Short of £44.65,
And isn't it seedy
To seem quite so greedy
When they're struggling so hard to survive?

Discretion's the best part of glamour,
And bubbles—the pink ones—may burst:
A national clamour
Will hit like a hammer
If we put ourselves publicly first.

It's Christmas all over the City,
But turkeys like us could be trussed—
Don't rattle the kitty
But cry, "More's the Pity!
We know what it's like to go bust!"

Like nobody's business, we're booming,
But don't breathe a word to the press:
The budget is looming
And cameras are zooming
On poor souls whose dole is distress.

(Will that do? There's some snap in our braces!
Our eyes are all gleaming like quartz!
The finger which traces
A smirk on our faces
Is fresh from a long line of noughts!)

Bill Greenwell

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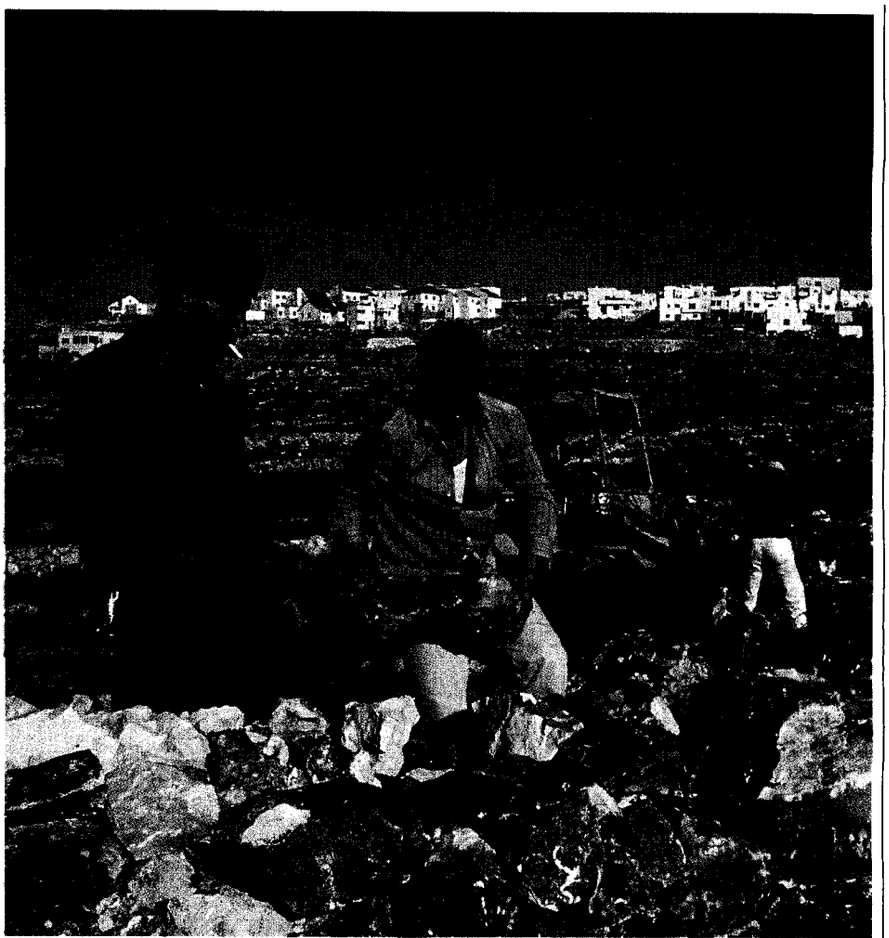

Stephen Howe and **Daphna Vardi** argue that, though the Middle East peace accord is more than just a cynical fix, everything depends on investment from outside

A peace of the action

At every stage in the progress of the Israeli-Palestinian peace accord, the language of crisis and imminent breakdown has been hovering over media reports in Britain and elsewhere. And there's been no shortage of simple, blanket dismissals of the whole process as a cynical fix or a sell-out of Palestinian aspirations. They've ranged from the near-flippant rubbishing of the whole process, as by Alexander Cockburn in *NSS* (1 October), to the more thoughtful, but nonetheless deeply defeatist, comments by Edward Said in the *London Review of Books* and elsewhere.

Yet there are powerful, and under-rehearsed, reasons for optimism. One of the most encouraging is the stubborn determination of those most intimately concerned in the negotiations that they *must* be made to work. On at least three occasions in recent weeks, apparent deadlocks have been reached in different sections of the bilateral Taba talks. One side or another has been on the verge of walking out each time. But a grim determination to make things succeed, an awareness that neither their own people nor the verdict of history would forgive them if this chance were lost, has kept everyone at the table.

The other underlying source of optimism is the radical shift in public opinion on both sides. Pre-deal opinion polls in both Israel and the Palestinian Territories indicated wild swings of sentiment, pivoting on a central point of near even divisions over the prospect of a historic compromise. Last year's Israeli election gave only the narrowest of majorities to the peace camp. Now, though, the scene appears transformed. Polls on both sides show a massive rallying of support to the deal. In the Territories, polls show 70 per cent in favour, 19 per cent undecided, only 11 per cent unshakeably opposed. Among Israelis, support for the agreement is running between 60 and 70 per cent according to different surveys, though renewed violence has induced a falling off in the most recent surveys. Even among Jewish settlers in the occupied lands—widely, and rightly, seen as among the greatest potential obstacles to the deal, there has been a dramatic dwindling in expressions of willingness to oppose it by force. In the most recent poll, just 2 per cent of settlers said they *might* resist violently.

The most decisive factor influencing success or failure, though, will in the end be the economic one. Every participant, and observer, recognises that support for the agreement among Palestinians will survive and extend if, and only if, it brings serious, rapid results on the ground: jobs, housing, improvement of the disastrous infrastructure and social services in the Israeli-occupied territories. As one key Palestinian participant says "If in the next nine months, change is not seen, then goodbye to peace. People will say, we gave everything and still there is no food, still the sewage system isn't working."

So what are the prospects for rapid economic change? Almost everything will depend on outside investment. Operating from New York, London, Paris and half a dozen Arab capitals is a substantial bloc of major-league Palestinian entrepreneurs and industrialists. Many of them combine serious wealth with significant political clout. They are now prepared to invest in the territories in a big way. More than prepared: several have plans at an advanced stage of readiness.

The business people are near-unanimous in their eagerness to explore the new potentialities, and keenly aware of the importance of economic growth to political prospects. They have fears as well as hopes, of course; but significantly, the worries are mostly about the short term, about the potential for derailment of the peace process in the coming few weeks or months, while the hopes and optimism are longer-term. If political obstacles continue to be overcome, if clear rules of engagement are set, and crucially, if people on the ground can see rapid signs of economic results, then everything is open.

There have already been a rush of approaches to Palestinian businesspeople by Israelis eager to discuss joint ventures, and their London homes have become sites for numerous mini-summits. Feelings on both sides about the future for such cooperation seem overwhelmingly positive: indeed it's thought both desirable and inevitable. Yet there is concern at what is widely perceived as an Israeli desire to rush too quickly on this front. One Palestinian entrepreneur, whose main activity is Jordan-based, suggests that Palestinian feelings after the agreement are like those of a child who needs to adjust to independence, and only thereafter will feel comfortable with cooperation. Their experience with meeting Israelis on an equal basis is still limited, he explains, so apparent hesitation should not be misunderstood.

Yet such emotions must be set against the impatience being generated elsewhere. One London-based Israeli lawyer, acting as legal adviser to prospective joint ventures, complains already of an excessively "Middle Eastern" style of negotiations: endless pleasantries and small-talk with few concrete outcomes. More seriously, the same Jordan-based tycoon returned from an exploratory visit to Gaza reporting how he and other business visitors found themselves almost besieged by local youths, all fiercely eager to know what was planned and how soon it might mean jobs for them.

Such eagerness for results inevitably impresses potential investors who usually have, after all, patriotic hearts as well as hard busi-

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Building a new society: could Palestine become the Switzerland of the Middle East?

ness heads. Mona al-Gussein, (daughter of Jawid, head of the Palestinian National Fund), however, suggests this will be a passing emotion. At the start, Palestinians from outside may invest out of patriotism, but soon they will expect a return on their money—as will their potential Israeli, and third-country, partners. This very hardheadedness, she believes, will strengthen the drive for cooperation:"It might not be the language some Palestinians want to hear, but it's a fact; we need each other."

Almost everyone believes the future lies not only in bilateral Israeli-Palestinian ventures but in wider regional integration. Jawid al-Gussein argues that the further one goes into detail the more one realises the need also to bring in Syria, Lebanon and even countries further afield. An Israeli-Jordanian treaty hasn't yet been signed; but King Hussein has indicated that economic cooperation can go ahead even in advance of a formal agreement. Zein Mayaffi, an engineer whose firm has been one of the Gulf's biggest contractors for road- and bridge-building, agrees. He also heads the Palestinian delegation to the economic strand of the multilateral talks. For him, investment in education and human capital is the key. "If we don't compete in quality, we'll be the pool of cheap labour for Israel. That is very worrying to me as a Palestinian." Thus, there's a crying need for proper market research into regional and wider opportunities. "The population [of the Territories] is small. We will need export markets, and to adjust local industry to the needs of those markets."

Mona al-Gussein is also a substantial businesswoman in her own right. And she's a political player: it's already been announced that she will be Arafat's official spokesperson on his trip to Britain next month. The experience of eastern Europe, where many newly democratic countries received extravagant promises of aid that are still unkept, worries her. She argues that private enterprise can be left to get on with building hotels or new communication networks, but governments and the EC must move rapidly on quality low-cost housing, schools, sewage and desalination plants.

Dr Yezid Sayigh, a senior adviser to the Palestinian side in the Taba talks, has slightly different anxieties. There is, as Dr. Sayigh warns, a serious danger of Israeli authorities seeking to maintain an excessive degree of control, in three spheres: use of their residual powers in the Palestinian-controlled areas, the role of the military government, and the joint liaison committees. Over-control might "suffocate local initiative". The international community must use its influence against this. But there is also, Sayigh believes, an opposite danger: that of Palestinians seeking to control too much too quickly, and thus failing in activities where a more gradual extension of influence would bring lasting success. Citing eastern European mistakes, he particularly worries, as do many observers, about potential over-bureaucratisation of the new self-governing authorities. The relative lack of administrative experience is a headache, hardly allayed by the fact that many of the bureaucrats-to-be are now being trained by Egypt—one of the world's most top-heavy and inefficient government machines. At worst, he estimates, administrative bottlenecks might result in up to 30 per cent of development funds being wasted.

To avoid this, he calls on the EC and its member states to help quickly with training and sharing skills: not only technically, but in terms of democratic practices, drafting legislation, ensuring accountability of the new institutions to their citizens. Sayigh accepts that in some cases there will be a need to give initial control over development projects to outsiders with relevant skills. But he urges a specific commitment to these being "shadowed" or "understudied" by locals to enable later self-sufficiency.

What is needed is aid in the rebuilding of Palestinian civil society. Palestinians have more experience of at least semi-democratic politics than most peoples in the region; but there are authoritarian and conspiratorial habits to be unlearned and overcome.

Palestinians have more experience of democratic politics than do most of the peoples in the region

There are other short-term difficulties too. Not least is the legal vacuum in the Territories. Under what laws will the new enterprises everyone wants to flood in be operating —Israeli, Jordanian, the often highly restrictive regulations of the military administration, or hastily-drafted new Palestinian ones? Uncertainty on this front must be resolved quickly if it's not to be a barrier to economic progress. And here Britain might have a role, since both Israeli and Jordanian commercial law are heavily based on the British model.

If Eberhard Rhein, the EC Commission Director responsible for the Middle East, is to be believed, calls like Sayigh's will not go unanswered. He too thinks the region's future lies in cooperation, and eventually in a regime of free trade, free movement of capital, services and labour like that envisaged for the EC itself. It would be a nonsense, for instance, to expend vast sums building a port at Gaza, and the EC will not help fund such an idea. Instead, nearby Israeli Ashdod should become a free port, handling both Israeli and Palestinian trade—and that's already firmly on the agenda of the bilateral talks.

Three principles, Rhein says, govern the Community's approach to the Israeli-Palestinian agreement. First, that peace depends on Palestinian economic desperation being reduced rapidly. Secondly, that there must be interaction not just of governments, but of people, on as many levels as possible. Third, the EC is determined to help in a non-patronising way, enabling rather than dictating. The Community has both finance and expertise ready and waiting to go, says Rhein.

British-based agency Cooperation for Development is one of the major players on the ground, especially in Gaza. Its General Secretary, Dr. Terry Lacey, stresses the need to concentrate on projects with very quick, highly visible results. The size of investments must be adjusted to these priorities: his organisation, working closely with the EC, is allocating £500,000 to activities that will achieve concrete returns within six months, a further £1 million to projects with a year's realisation time. Activities are already in progress that should create over 1,000 new jobs by December, and 3,000-4,000 during 1993-1994. They'll also deliver around a thousand new housing units in the same time scale. Longer-term schemes centred on education and the development of human capital are less urgent but, in the long run, no less essential: Lacey emphasises the bitter Palestinian experience as a source of low-skill, low-wage labour for the Israeli economy, and warns against joint ventures premised on Israelis providing the know-how and Palestinians the manpower. It needn't be so: in many fields the Territories already possess an impressive range of technical skills.

Eberhard Rhein concurs: compared with the EC's development project partners in other parts of the Middle East, he sees Palestine as having very good economic prospects. Dr Lacey also makes a perhaps more surprising point. Despite the Gaza Strip's notorious social, economic and political distress, it is in some ways easier to bring about economic progress there than on the West Bank. It has better internal communications, greater homogeneity, fewer old men from old ruling families, whose conservative instincts may block innovation.

It's not just cooperation between Israelis and Palestinians that is under intense discussion, but the relationship between Palestinians in the occupied territories and those in the diaspora. They too, as Zein Mayaffi underlines, need each other: he's emphatic that the political leadership makes full use of the huge expertise and influence of the worldwide Palestinian community, with its business, technical and educational skills.

In the short term, then, job creation, housing, agriculture and basic infrastructure are the priorities everyone agrees on. Beyond that, a wide range of light industries are active candidates for development. The area has great underused tourist potential, which greater security and open borders should enhance. A joint eastern Mediterranean tourist authority, linking Israel, Arab states and others in the region, is being launched. Some believe there's a great future in financial services. Mona al-Gussein envisages the area as a "Switzerland of the Middle East", offering competitive tax advantages, financial services to Arab countries and a base for international corporations. In industry, she believes, Palestine can't or shouldn't compete with the cheap labour forces of the far east but, with the right infrastructure, it has vast potential in other spheres.

On every level, then, things have gone far beyond the simple declarations for and against the agreement that have dominated our media. On the all-important economic front, forward planning for the future not only of the Palestinian territories but of the whole region is very far advanced. The picture bears little relation to the doom-laden economic scenario sketched by Edward Said and others.

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David Blunkett takes issue with Julian Le Grand's praise of this government's market-led health service

Patients is a virtue

I was saddened to read Julian Le Grand's review of the government's NHS changes in last week's *NSS* ("For better or worse?"). Saddened, because it reinforced my fear that some academics are detached from the everyday experience of the patients.

He twice warns opposition parties against "shroud-waving". He is of course right. In the 18 months I have been the shadow secretary of state for health, I have studiously avoided whipping-up public feeling and emotional reaction. Instead, I have chosen to confront the government on key indicators of NHS performance. These include, for example, the increase of 100,000 in the waiting list since the general election—the existence of hidden waiting lists and the crucial time it takes for the first important consultant appointment—the 25 per cent rise in the first six months of this financial year in the number of people waiting more than a year for treatment. There has also been a 37 per cent increase in complaints within hospital and community health services between 1990-91 and 1991-92.

GP fundholding—which the article praises—has clearly created a two-tier access to health, as Paddy Ross, chairman of the BMA Joint Consultants Committee, has rightly highlighted. He said: "Patients from non-fundholders are being denied treatment at a time when patients from fundholding practices are being treated. This strikes at the fundamental principle of the NHS that there should be equity of access and that the timing of treatment should be based on clinical need." Consultants are currently the targets of those who wish to prove that the new system is working. Perhaps it is well to examine the impact of GP fundholding on the patient.

Take, for instance, the evidence produced in the fundholders' own magazine, *Fundholding*, in relation to performance. Over a third of 194 fundholders responding to the survey said that there had either been no change, or that their waiting lists had stayed the same since joining the fundholding scheme. At the same time, GP fundholders are now shown to be absorbing £30,500 in administrative and computer costs for every £1,500 allocated to non-fundholding GPs.

It was not just the most "dynamic GP practices" which became fundholders. In fact, many of those most committed to providing an innovative and caring service were reluctant to become fundholders in the first wave. Indeed, Dr David Tod, president of the National Association of Fundholding Practices, has suggested in a document on purchasing intentions for his practice that he could take no more patients with learning difficulties unless extra funding was provided.

To overcome the anomaly created by two-tier purchasing, it is suggested that GP fundholders might become accountable to the District Health Authority—itself a purchaser. This seems somewhat at odds with the rationale behind the government's GP fundholding experiment, which was in essence to break up the "monopoly" held by the DHA. In simple terms, there was to be competition.

That experiment has resulted in the disintegration of coordinated and planned purchasing policies. That is why we must reintroduce coordination, not least in achieving health promotion and a public health-led agenda. But planning should also form part of joint commissioning, involving GPs and the health authority working together. Developing this cooperation rather than competition implies a more fundamental change of attitude than merely tinkering with the existing internal market.

The competitive market cannot deliver coherent change. It will lead to the sort of anomalies we are already seeing

More worrying, however, is Le Grand's presumption that the "opposition parties" are faced with the choice of going backwards to 1989, or accepting a slightly modified version of the government's current competitive market. It is clear that in order to regain the intellectual ascendency, the left in British politics must be prepared to think more imaginatively than this.

In the 21st century, we will be faced with the twin challenge of new technology and the great strides in molecular and biotechnological research. Labour's vision for the future of health care needs to recognise the vital importance of providing health services as close to where people live as possible, bringing them the benefits of modern science and technology, and the comfort of their own home. But such a shift to primary and community care has to involve long-term planning and the development of a consultation process that gauges the interest of the population.

In other words, if we are to tackle the problem of hospitals that are inappropriately sited or no longer likely to be relevant within the new health framework in 10 or 20 years' time, we can achieve change only through a planned approach to delivery of the service.

The competitive market cannot deliver this coherent change. It will lead instead to the sort of anomalies that threaten the existence of University College Hospital, London. The pressures of the internal market are undermining the viability of its accident and emergency department, and the shelving of non-urgency treatment is undermining the viability of the main in-patient facilities. Despite the fact that UCH did not appear on either Sir Bernard Tomlinson's list of closures or on those drawn up through the speciality reviews, it is now threatened by the internal market. The world-famous research and training facilities at UCH are dependent on a continuance of the direct patient services. The market may be able to force the closure of services, but it can never control, plan or bring into effect positive change, nor deal with the aftermath of unplanned decisions.

The market is equally ill-equipped to deal with the provision of specialist services, such as intensive care, particularly for babies and paediatric intensive services. Specialist care requires cross-boundary regional planning, a concept which is in danger of being destroyed by the government in its review of NHS functions and management—where accountability is being replaced by civil servants administering the political direction of the Secretary of State.

The restoration of accountability is crucial to the NHS. In removing the unaccountable non-executive membership of trusts, we will be looking again at the representative hospital boards that existed prior to 1974. It is important that a democratic link is restored between health authorities and local people. But the key problem with the trusts is the internal market. The market must be replaced by a properly planned system which ensures that patients get the care they need.

When we publish Labour's consultation paper in the early new year, our approach will spell out a forward vision rather than looking backwards.

We want to put the patient first. That means introducing rights of information, treatment and redress. It also entails developing an NHS that is designed not just to provide care and treatment, but which also meets their expectations through new rights as users to that service. The "doctor knows best" attitude must be replaced by a genuine partnership between the skilled professional and the well-informed patient.

Second, we wish to reassert the importance of a new public health agenda. We will do this in a comprehensive fashion in contrast to the Health of the Nation targets introduced by the government, recognising that government must share responsibility for health with individuals and families. This can best be illustrated by the government's attitude in persuading individuals not to smoke and our plan to ban tobacco advertising.

Third, and perhaps most importantly, our agenda will recognise the opportunities and the challenge of creating a new primary health care-led service.

Our approach is a confident and modern one. It is our agenda for the future, not merely a reaction to the errors of the government. Health care cannot be equated with the operation of commercial business. Yet even there the need for regulation and a planned and coordinated approach is clearly recognised. As a colleague of mine observed: "Where would we be if we relied on the market to ensure the safe take-off and landing of aircraft at Heathrow? Languishing on a trolley in an accident and emergency unit, waiting for the 'reformed' NHS to find us a bed."

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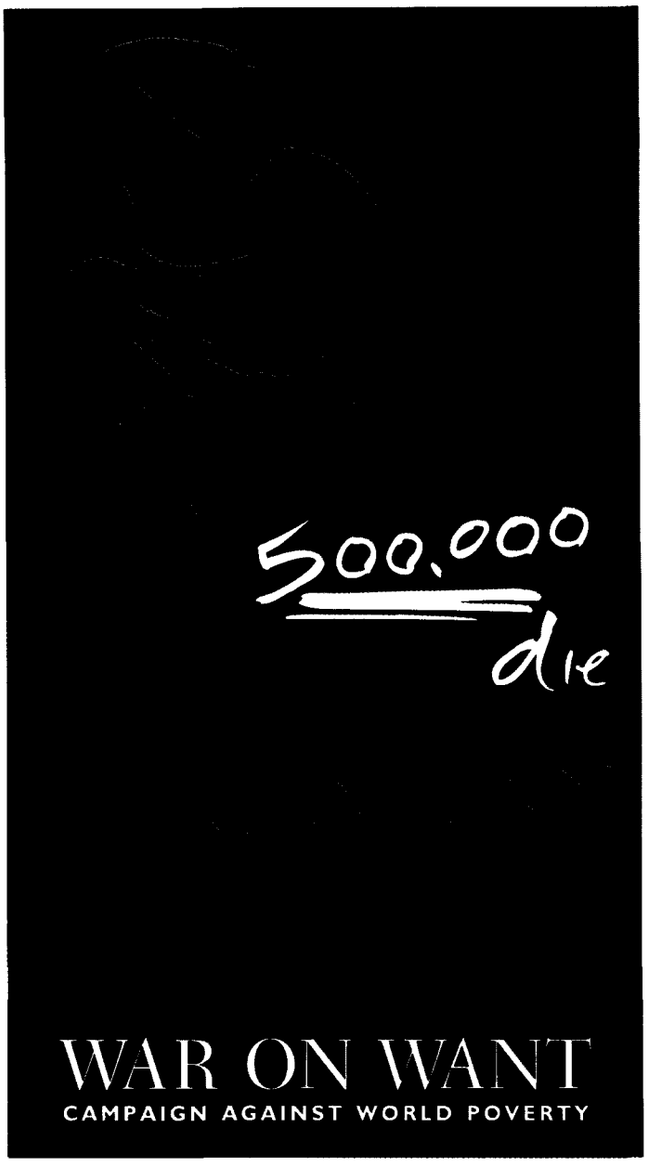

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Was Jack Kennedy a schizophrenic war mongerer? **Gore Vidal** gives a personal account of the president he knew

JFK's war games

Thirty years after Jack Kennedy was assassinated in Dallas, the obsession with his terrible end has in many ways obscured him. To many people he is really only known as a source of mystery—who killed him and why? I will leave that to the brilliant Oliver Stone to speculate on. I wish to meditate a little on Kennedy himself.

The stepfather of Kennedy's wife, Jackie, was previously my stepfather. My mother divorced a gentleman called Mr Auchincloss, who thus ceased to be my stepfather; and then Janet Bouvier, Jackie's mother, married him. My first memory of Jack was in 1956, when I congratulated him on having missed the nomination for vice-president, which he would have run on the doomed ticket headed by Adlai Stevenson, and which might have been an end to his career. He was upset at the time but, all in all, he later thought it rather a good thing that he had not run for vice president in 1956 and could get ready for the presidential election in 1960.

That year, I ran for Congress, in upstate New York, and he, of course, ran for the presidency. I saw a good bit of him then and afterwards. He was an interesting character, much more so than the playboy he's been made out to be. He had that side to him; and he certainly had his womanising side, which was more athletic than romantic.

But I also remember he was of a very thoughtful turn of mind. He once asked how it was that, in the 18th century, the United States, with fewer than three million people, produced two world-class geniuses, Benjamin Franklin and Thomas Jefferson? And he said something very funny after becoming president. He said: "You know, in this job I get to meet everybody. I meet all these important people I've always heard about, these movers and shakers, and I'm always upset by how second-rate they are." And he asked, "What's the difference between now and the 18th century, where people were so much more learned and had more languages than we do?"

We then speculated upon what makes a great president, and he said that had it not been for the civil war, Abraham Lincoln would have been just another railroad lawyer who had got to the White House. And I said, "Without a war, what will you be?" "Well, I'll be the first Catholic ever elected," he replied. I said I didn't think that would look very glorious in the history books, did he? "No," he said.

Then, in August 1961, I went up to Hyannisport for four days. The Berlin Wall had just gone up and there was talk of war and nuclear strikes, and I remember Jackie rang. I was staying at a nearby motel: would I come over for dinner? And I said I didn't know: should I have dinner with the president, aren't you going to be the first people that the Russians blow up tonight? She said we would all go together.

So I went over and it was quite eerie, just Jack and Jackie, two or three friends and then aides in and out. He was his usual self, a little irritable. None of us really had much idea what was going on.

Jack had ordered the biggest and fastest military build-up in American history, at least since Franklin Roosevelt's after Pearl Harbour. And, as he talked, I could see more and more an enthusiasm for war. Why he should have had this I don't know, but it may have had something to do with the idea that our most famous presidents—George Washington, Franklin Roosevelt, Theodore Roosevelt, Woodrow Wilson—were presidents who presided over wars.

The problem had been that the cold war was invented not by Stalin, but by Harry Truman, the American industrialist who wanted to keep the country on a military footing with this Wizard of Oz enemy the Soviet Union, which in reality was never any threat to us. Jack was of a younger generation, and he wanted to *win* the cold war, which had been no more than rhetoric for Eisenhower and Truman. Suddenly it began to fall into place at the inauguration. "We will bear any burden so that freedom will prevail," he declared. What was this—a declaration of war on the USSR?

Then the first thing he did when he came into office was to invade Cuba—and then get cold feet in the middle of the invasion and withdraw. This made him look very bad, so they tried to blame it on Eisenhower, but it was totally Kennedy's responsibility.

The Cuban missile crisis nearly brought the US to a nuclear end. We did not know it at the time, but the Russian commanders with the missiles in Cuba had nuclear weapons that could have taken out virtually the entire US. Kennedy was playing a very dangerous game in order to look like the winner of the cold war and the Augustus of the modern west. There was a phrase he kept using over and over again that used to get on my nerves: "Here we are in this twilight time." Well, I thought, for God's sake, you are a 44-year-old president, you are not in your twilight at all, you're having a great time and your main interest in life aside from winning the cold war is what is Hope Lange really like? There was not a movie star in Hollywood that he was not constantly tracking as part of, how shall we say, his athleticism.

I've just gone over four pages of notes that I kept in August 1961 at Hyannisport. Kennedy comes across as schizophrenic. At one moment, he's getting ready for war. Then he switches back and forth. At one stage, Jackie suddenly commented, quite seriously, on the fact that, "You people make a war and my children are going to be killed along with everybody else's. Don't you consider that?" Kennedy backed down immediately, and said, "Well, look, I'm really a peace-at-any-price man." I asked what the military build-up was all about then, and he answered that it was for political reasons. He was not certain of winning the next election, particularly if Rockefeller was the Republican candidate, and he would have to explain the Bay of Pigs and the loss of Laos, which he had all but surrendered to Soviet influence in a fateful meeting with Khrushchev at Vienna.

They tried to blame Cuba on Eisenhower, but it was totally Kennedy's responsibility

And so the most fateful decision of 1960s US politics was made. Vietnam, we had agreed, looked like a country in which a civil war was going on. Eisenhower had agreed that we should go by the Geneva Accords, which established one country that would hold democratic elections. They did and Ho Chi Minh was elected president. Eisenhower refused to accept his election, as he was a communist, and Jack suddenly saw he had his war. We would go in to the civil war in south east Asia and he would be a wartime president. Just before he went to Dallas he sent 20,000 participating troops and committed us to the war. As he said to a great friend of mine the day before his assassination in Dallas: "After Cuba and Laos, I've got to go all the way with this one."

So Kennedy went to his death as a man who had committed the country to a war that he might have ended earlier—we don't know because he didn't live—but that, in fact, lasted for 13 years and effectively ended the American hegemony of the world.

*This article is based on "JFK: A Personal Memory by Gore Vidal", shown on BBC2 on Sunday 21 Nov*ember

Kennedy and Eisenhower in 1962/Hulton

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The Labour leadership's conversion to full employment is to be welcomed. Now it is time to sell positive government intervention to the people, says **Bryan Gould**

Working back to happiness

The Labour leadership's new-found commitment to full employment is very welcome, especially its commitment to the Full Employment Forum, which was set up just a few months ago with precisely this aim in mind.

But, having rediscovered the language of full employment, the question now is, can we pass beyond lip service to make the commitment a real one? Do our leaders mean—and understand—the commitment they have made?

Do they recognise that a genuine commitment to full employment is inconsistent with other policy goals they have set themselves? Do they see, for example, that it means the end of a consensus that has done so much damage to Labour's economic credibility—the consensus that government's only responsibility is to establish monetary discipline, and that full employment is accordingly beyond the reach of economic policy?

If Labour is to intervene to achieve full employment, we cannot lock up our policy weapons in a Euro-monetarist straitjacket

It is an indication of how little our leaders understand this that Gordon Brown, in his recent pamphlet *How We Can Conquer Unemployment*, can still say: "The macro-economic role of government should be to build a stable and predictable monetary framework, a platform on which sustainable growth can be built".

A government committed to full employment must go beyond a "monetary framework" and *intervene* in the management of the national economy in order to achieve real, and not just monetary, economic aims. This would require a reversal of the belief, reiterated in Gordon Brown's pamphlet, that an expansionary economic policy is beyond the scope of national policy-making.

It will also require a change of heart from John Smith. He had, after all, as shadow chancellor—in a major interview with the *Independent* in 1990—explicitly endorsed the monetarist view that government bears no responsibility for unemployment, beyond its duty to establish, with the help of the ERM, the necessary monetary discipline.

So, when in his TUC speech he committed the party to using "all the instruments of macro-economic policy—interest rates, exchange rates and public borrowing" to secure full employment, he appeared to be renouncing his monetarist past and accepting that full employment, not monetary discipline, is the proper objective of government action.

If this welcome conversion is to carry conviction, however, it must be accompanied by an explicit recognition that the use of "the instruments of macro-economic policy" to secure full employment is incompatible with the party's equally explicit commitment to the ERM and a European Monetary System as set out in the Maastricht Treaty.

If the national government is to intervene—using interest rates, exchange rates, public spending and borrowing—to achieve full employment, we cannot lock up these policy weapons in a Euro-monetarist straitjacket. We need to know which commitment prevails.

If we are to intervene in macro-economic policy, we must recognise that policies suited to the economy's needs at one moment may be quite inappropriate at another. If the instruments of policy are to be used effectively, they must be used variably. That is why the monetarist straitjacket, whether imposed by a national or European central bank, would be so inappropriate and destructive. It is the goals—like full employment—that must remain constant, not the policies.

What would the proper use of "the instruments of macro-economic policy" require in present circumstances? Interest rates must certainly come down further. They are still damagingly high in real terms. High interest rates are a premium paid to those who already hold wealth by those wishing to create wealth. Cheap money would boost investment, help confidence, make room for changes in the tax regime and cut costs, inflation and the burden of government debt. There is a strong case for an immediate cut of two or three percentage points.

A cut in interest rates of this magnitude would encourage a lower level for the pound. A high pound inflates the value of assets at the cost of penalising the productive sector—another example of our predilection for favouring the asset-holder at the expense of the wealth-creator. Virtually the whole gain to competitiveness secured following last year's devaluation has now been reversed by a government that has been deliberately edging the pound back up to ERM levels. No wonder the recovery is faltering and exports are sluggish.

We should guarantee British industry that the pound will be held at a competitive level for the foreseeable future. Only then can British industry be expected to make long-term investment plans. And only then can we operate the economy at full employment levels without running into further balance of payments problems.

We should refuse to be obsessed by public borrowing and the size of the PSBR. The deficit is the child of the recession. Anything that inhibits recovery—such as tax rises or spending cuts—will make the deficit worse. You do not escape from recession by making people poorer.

We should instead reform public finances by distinguishing between capital investment and current spending, and by encouraging off-balance sheet financing for infrastructure projects. We should boost demand and the level of economic activity through an increase in public investment, directed particularly through housing. It should be financed through a combination of tax increases for the very rich (for reasons of social justice as much as for revenue-raising), savings from reduced defence expenditure, and some increased borrowing if necessary.

It may also be sensible—in the precise circumstances at present—to "monetise" part of the debt, that is, to refinance it through government-created credit. This boost to the money supply would help to keep interest rates low and the pound competitive. In other conditions, of course, it might be necessary to restrict credit creation, rather than encourage it.

A regime of cheap money, competitive exchange rates, and increased public investment would set a macro-economic context in which firms and individuals would be encouraged to spend and invest, and in which other longer-term interventionist measures—long advocated by Labour's front-bench team—could then be effective in strengthening our industrial base and ending the short-termism that has done so much damage.

A policy platform of this sort would give Labour a distinctive economic policy that would command wide support from industry and economic commentators, as well as from Labour's traditional supporters.

It would give priority to the interests of those who live and work in the real economy, rather than those who merely manipulate assets. It would identify Labour with our strongest possible issue—full employment—and would be consistent with Labour's general political stance.

But these benefits cannot be achieved if we remain too timid to tackle the Tories on their weakest ground. If we want to turn Tory failures to our advantage, and show our own economic competence, we have to be positive. It is now time to get off the fence and take the case for full employment to the people.

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The Nimbies in the Labour Party

The protests against all-women shortlists in Labour parliamentary selections have been gathering force, particularly since the great hullabaloo about votes for women in the shadow cabinet. It is all a terrible waste of time. The leadership will not turn its back on all-women shortlists unless forced to by the courts. This has less to do with heroic resistance to the sniping by a few elder statesmen—Neil Kinnock and Roy Hattersley spring to mind—than the way the policy was passed at the Labour Party conference in Brighton.

If the rule change passed virtually unnoticed, it is because it was the least controversial part of celebrated card vote "E", which introduced one member, one vote into parliamentary selections. Hattersley snorted on *On the Record* at the weekend that this kind of Christmas-tree resolution (on which everything, good and bad, is hung) represented the Labour Party conference at its worst. Be that as it may, it is thanks to all-women shortlists that John Smith achieved his Omov triumph.

Mixing the two issues together was a sneaky move for the benefit of MSF, which was itching to back Smith in defiance of its own conference. Attention was drawn to the union's "dual mandate" to oppose Omov and support all-women shortlists. The two policies were clearly incompatible, so MSF dumped its anti-Omov stance in favour of the politically correct decision to back greater women's representation. And what would happen if Smith reneged on the decision? "We'd die," says a union source.

The policy will survive, but Labour's hold on women's loyalty is growing weaker by the day. If Labour men keep complaining about being unfairly treated, women will get the message that they are not wanted. In a Fabian pamphlet about quotas published a few years ago, Clare Short, Angela Eagle and Rachel Brooks pointed out that women voters already regarded Labour as the most "male" party, and credited the Tories with the (popular) move to create a women's ministry. Today, Labour's "maleness" seems even more obvious.

One of the most common misapprehensions, encouraged by the men, is that women are going to be forced on local constituency parties in droves. In fact, the rule change only calls for women candidates in half the winnable seats that fall vacant. The crucial words here are *winnable* and *vacant*. A surprising number of intelligent people are under the impression that, in one fell swoop, women are going to replace half of all men as candidates.

It is worth examining the rule changes closely, beginning with the "target" of 50 per cent women candidates in the seats where a Labour MP is retiring. It should be remembered that it is only when an MP retires that the most desirable and greatly coveted safe seats become available.

At the 1992 election, 19 MPs retired, three were deselected and two expelled—a total of 24. In 21 of those seats, the new candidate was male. Only three women got a look-in: Helen Jackson in Sheffield Hillsborough; Rachel Squire in Dunfermline West; and Jane Kennedy in Liverpool Broadgreen, all of whom have majorities of under 10,000.

If 24 Labour MPs retire at the next election and the "target" is met, a grand total of 12 new women in all-England, Scotland and Wales will make it to parliament in their place. Frightening, isn't it?

A handful of men will naturally be disappointed. They may have been nursing a particular seat for years, waiting to step into dead men's shoes. With the exception of London, the best seats are very often doled out to union men, with the departing MP's blessing. As a result of this favouritism, Labour women are concentrated in marginal seats, where they can be swept out of parliament by the slightest swing of the pendulum. A bad year for the party could wipe out nearly all the progress women have made.

At the rate of change in recent elections, it would take 200 years for Labour women to get equal representation

Everyone cheered when 14 new Labour women were elected last year. But 11 had to win their seats off the Tories; and only three of them have majorities of more than 2,500. Three have majorities of less than 600. Do Labour men have a god-given right to the safest seats in parliament?

It is remarkable how many of the existing Labour women with majorities of more than 5,000 owe their seats to special circumstances, such as a by-election, a sudden retirement or an expulsion. Irene Adams, Mo Mowlam, Harriet Harman, Kate Hoey and Jane Kennedy all fall into this category. It reinforces the point that men have usually stitched up the best seats in advance. If they are not already entrenched locally, they tend to be freer to scour the country in search of vacancies, either because they have more money or less responsibility for childcare.

What about the marginal seats that Labour hopes to wrest from its rivals? Labour needs to win an extra 55 seats in order to form a majority government. If half of these are contested—and won—by women, an extra 27-28 women will be elected. Add to these the 12 women who may replace retiring members and there will be a total of 40 new Labour women in parliament. Add to these the existing 37 women MPs and there will be a total of 77 women out of a notional 326 Labour MPs in parliament: fewer than one in four. That's assuming every single woman makes it. Most people reckon that, at best, there will be no more than 65 Labour women MPs after the next election.

It is in response to this menace that the wail of vested interests has gone up. Arthur Scargill's veiled threat to take legal action on behalf of the NUM in order to ensure that men are treated "equally" with women should be laughed out of court. Are we to suppose that seats in mining areas should remain the sole preserve of men? And are some conference resolutions less sacred than others?

As long ago as 1989, the Labour conference voted overwhelmingly to bring about equal representation between men and women in the parliamentary party by the year 2000. The policy also sailed through the national executive without a whisper of dissent. The party was impressed by the progress on quotas made by sister parties in Europe, particularly the SPD (whose list system helped ease the pain of transition).

Barbara Follett of Emily's List has calculated that, at the average rate of change in recent general elections, it would take more than 200 years for Labour women to gain equal representation.

Only positive discrimination can speed matters up, but it has just dawned on the men that a few of them—only a few, mind—may have to relinquish their privileged status. The result has been an absurd outbreak of Nimbyism. To use equal-opportunity legislation in the courts, as the Labour Campaign for Real Equality as well as the NUM is contemplating, would be to pervert the purpose for which that legislation was passed. The Labour leadership is confident it can win the legal argument, but such a battle would inevitably be damaging.

For the most part, local parties will reach agreement on the number of women candidates in their region without too much difficulty. But a couple of obstreperous men could scupper Labour's reputation for fairness and perceived commitment to equality. All for the sake of having more grey suits in parliament.

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SIDELINERS

Apart from such earth-shakers as the second world war, the Suez invasion or the sacking of Margaret Thatcher, few MPs—Tony Benn apart—change their basic outlooks. The usual difference is whether they hold their noses from loyalty to party whips or ambition. Thus it was once suicidal for ambitious Tories to tell the truth about the poll tax.

This is what makes Alan Howarth CBE so interesting. The rigorously intellectual Tory MP for Stratford-upon-Avon and a former Central Office bigwig (director of Conservative research department, vice-chairman of the Conservative Party) had seemed the impeccable monetarist. After a 1983 anti-inflation maiden speech, he co-founded the Thatcherite No Turning Back group, became Dr Rhodes Boyson's PPS, then a whip and, in 1989, Mrs Thatcher's higher education under-secretary.

Those who heard his Monday morning "Today" interview urging expanded welfare spending might have thought him a Tory Keynesian like Sir Peter Tapsell, rather than still loyal to No Turning Back. Howarth also gave the impression of a wet in last summer's budget debates, when he tried to protect charities from VAT on heating and £100 million in advanced corporation tax.

Nobody was surprised that Howarth's argument was rejected. What was mysterious was how he had reached this position, when the taxes he was challenging had been fixed mainly by former members of the very No Turning Back group he co-founded. His Keynesian-sounding answer is that it is possible to be compassionate on social spending, which helps to create jobs, without fearing inflation during a long recession.

Having defended the Major government loyally during the election campaign, Howarth suddenly made his excuses and left it when it won in April 1992. He explains that he wanted a change (that is, promotion) from higher education, which was refused, making him find his liberty on the back benches. Cynics point to a well-paid consultancy for the Voyager Group of Virgin-Atlantic's Richard Branson. Howarth became an assiduous attender at the Tory backbench aviation committee, where he clashed with John Wilkinson, who protested at his cross-examination of BA chairman Sir Colin Marshall without disclosing he worked for Branson, then involved in mammoth legal actions against BA.

This April 1993 clash was all the more surprising because both Wilkinson and Howarth are headmasters' sons, were Cambridge contemporaries, and had trudged through the anti-Maastricht lobbies together. Howarth's main opposition was to stricter rules for things like abattoirs. "My slaughterhouses are facing a huge rise in costs for no reason. No one has died in my constituency from eating meat from my small butchers." None of the "bastards" who remained in government replied adequately. But in government you can fight your corner without being intellectually rigorous.

Andrew Roth

EDWARD PEARCE

Ian Taylor's absence from office is inexplicable. It is a test of Major's nerve to recognise this merit by hiring it

Debates following Queen's speeches are a bit like those following the budget, only less structured. Actually, the present one is about as structured as isinglass. After the leaders, we get successive days on "subjects". It was to be local government on Monday and, as Harry Enfield's awful old man says, "You don't want to do local government." The second day, foreign and defence policy, was more interesting but not coherent. Assorted people tell the Speaker they want to bang on about them and, indulgently in the increasingly Montessori-style of backbencher-rearing, they are encouraged.

Michael Colvin, the man with a thing about regiments and cap badges (jolly important cap badges, I think they may secrete testosterone) goes on about them, interrupted only by the man with a thing about the territorials (Mr Brazier). Julian Brazier, if I have him right, wants to call troops up or out in the manner of the American National Guard. Quite what we have to learn from Quayle's Fourteenth of Foot I can't think. But Julian, a slightly febrile seven feet with a gleam, thinks we can, and nobody bothered to argue. But in these debates, nobody does. They just sit there clutching their speeches and intimating availability in the best Reeperbahn shop-window manner.

David Hunt is a member of the cabinet! And David Hunt has all the qualities of a sponge, except usefulness

Not that they don't have something worth saying, the best of them. Emma Nicholson, a very good thing (too good—and European—for her prospects), bangs on about the marsh Arabs, and how right she is. The people being gassed by yesterday's universal villain, today's regrettable element and the day before yesterday's useful trading partner, are a subject to scream about. Backbenchers like Miss Nicholson can only publicise and embarrass. May she give the morally challenged takers of the broad view a bad time!

Another MP I gladly hear any time is Ian Taylor, Tory member for Esher, known because of his foreign-policy expertise, as "the Esher Metternich". Taylor's absence from office is inexplicable, even when his consistent commitment to the European Community is weighed. There are people in junior office at present who would have a hard time of it running Tramways and Fine Arts in Welshpool. David Hunt is a member of the cabinet! And David Hunt has all the qualities of a sponge, except usefulness.

Taylor talks—on this occasion about Russia and her neighbours—but on request, on America, the EC, internal French and German politics and the problems of the zloty—like a man running a high-quality seminar at Chatham House . . . or the Goethe Institute. For unfortunately, he *likes foreigners*, knows senior foreign politicians and can talk to them in their own languages. I suppose, in the present state of his party, we should be grateful he isn't in the Tower. Even so, it is a simple test of John Major's nerve to recognise this extreme merit by hiring it.

Taylor was warning us in the debate about the general disposition of Russia to protect 30 million Russians in other parts of the late Soviet Union in ways living up to the word "protection". Michael Gapes, a Labour member new to me, though I keep mistaking him for Nick Raynsford, said some necessary things about Yeltsin the Democrat in whom strangely he seems to lack perfect and beautiful faith. (I cherish the fact of having said that I thought Yeltsin an uncomplicated fascist just *before* he shelled parliament.)

The area is horribly unstable, ruled by the sort of men who did all right out of the 14th century, and they've hardly started fighting each other yet. Everyone nodded their heads at this truth, but if the Foreign Office has a view of how to handle a Dark Age pitted with warheads, it hasn't expanded on it.

The round-up of debate was altogether less useful. David Clark for Labour is one of those moderate men who feel called upon to thunder. Mr Rifkind for the government was patronising about nuclear defence and Labour's great refusal. In one sense, Labour is horribly embarrassed. Having retreated into unilateralism without believing in it, it has to face the bogus triumphalism of people who think that "our bomb" and launch facilities actually mattered in the collapse of the Soviet regime. They didn't, but Trident, which now has as much practical use as a lawnmower on the Solent, is held up by Mr Rifkind as the measure of Conservative moral excellence. I suppose it is.

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"Was Deputy Assistant Commissioner Osland (Letters, 5 November) at the same demonstration as Steve Platt ('Or was it a police riot?', 22 October)?" asks Paul Hubert, of Frizinghall, Bradford. "And if not, which demonstration were the camera crews of ITN attending?"

Hubert says he found my article about last month's anti-racist march in Welling, south London, "pleasingly fair in tone, although, since I was at the back of the march, I cannot personally vouch for the truth of much of it. I worried about the facts of events at the front because I don't like taking things on trust from members of the SWP [or Militant, for that matter]. And naturally, the account of a senior police officer cannot simply be dismissed since, if he is a liar, he must be a sophisticated one.

"Mr Osland wrote categorically that 'Lodge Hill [the approved route along which police wanted to divert the march] was never blocked by police, but by marchers stopping, turning round and watching the violent confrontation precipitated by a large minority of marchers'. I was watching the World in Action documentary on the demonstration on 15 November, and what should I see? A line of police quietly blocking Lodge Hill! Perhaps you might like to invite Mr Osland to let us know on what other points his recollection of events at Welling might prove to be inaccurate, and whether there are any other episodes in his career he would like taken into consideration."

I too have seen the World in Action film to which Hubert refers—and other, as yet unscreened, footage taken by television camera crews on the day. It does indeed prove what David Osland and other senior Met officers have consistently denied: that lines of police, on foot and mounted, blocked the very route that the police say they wanted the demonstration to take. Cameras don't lie—in this instance at least. Did the police?

Steve Platt

National Health Shambles

Given that the NHS "reforms" have been in place for only 18 months, and given his own admission that no research worthy of the name has been carried out in regard to their effectiveness or otherwise, Julian Le Grand's assertion ("For better or worse?", 19 November) that "many, perhaps most, health policy analysts" would choose the "new", rather than the "old", NHS is breathtakingly sweeping for a professedly open-minded academic who, by definition, should be basing his conclusions on hard evidence. All that Le Grand's assertion can mean is that "many, if not most" health policy analysts are crypto-ideologues of the right.

To suggest that the choice is between the "old" command economy and the "new" quasi-market is to ignore the first 30 years or so of the NHS, when it functioned in terms of neither of these Thatcherite aberrations. It was Keith Joseph who foisted the bureaucratic, command model on the NHS. With its centralised "planning system", this was the first Tory attempt to cut back on NHS expenditure. When it failed, this "disorganisation" was followed by Griffiths-type "business managers", and then by Kenneth Clarke's white paper and the current re-disorganisation. In short, "old" and "new", in the context of the past 20 years of the NHS, are simply opposite sides of the same Tory shambles. It is time to consign both of these disastrous aberrations to the dustbin, and get back on course with a health service that is not broken *up* into competing fragments, but is broken *down* into locally based community health teams, in which the different agencies and professionals involved are able to work together with "integrated therapeutic purpose", and in terms of a *health*, not just a health *service*, ethos.

All this was on the way in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Even Amitai Etzioni's concept of decentralised, "mixed scanning" planning (so-named because it moved back and forth flexibly between the periphery and the centre) was becoming an idea in good currency, when the Tories took over in 1979 and the NHS ceased to be needs-led, becoming instead a finance-driven system whose main aim was to reduce costs by putting a solid wall of bureaucrats and accountants between the needs of the community and the resources available to meet these needs.

Drummond Hunter
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Edinburgh

The erosion of democracy

The shameful behaviour of the government, and in particular the Health Secretary Virginia Bottomley, in using unelected quangos to push through wildly unpopular changes to the NHS is vividly exemplified in the case of the dismemberment of the Great Yarmouth and Waveney district health authority. In order to establish a pre-ordained pattern of four health authorities in East Anglia, the East Anglian regional health authority (EARHA) proposed to split the currently successful and undoubtedly viable Great Yarmouth and Waveney district health authority. Half is to go to Norwich, and half to Ipswich. So there has been a charade of "local consultation".

Opposition to the proposal has been 100 per cent, reflected by the informed opposition of the medical professionals, the community health council, the district council and the general public. A public meeting packed to overflowing a school hall, and not one voice was raised to support the proposal as offered by an officer of the regional health authority. Members of all political parties were present. Both the MP for Great Yarmouth Michael Cartiss, and the MP for Waveney David Porter, have opposed the change.

There have been large demonstrations in opposition, and a huge petition of more than 22,000 signatures has been presented to the Health Department, with the support of both the Conservative MPs. The Waveney Health Action Group has been set up to campaign on behalf of the community to preserve its health authority. A large number of local people supported their representatives when they met EARHA members to put the case against the proposal. A coachload of us travelled to Cambridge to the crucial meeting of the EARHA, and were allowed to state that case again. David Porter MP led a delegation to junior health minister Tim Sackville; thousands of postcards from local people have been sent to Virginia Bottomley.

What has been the result of all this? Sackville has announced that the change will go ahead. This, despite the assurances of NHS chief executive Duncan Nichol that "as for district health authorities, changes will only be pursued if they have local support and if they result in tangible benefits to patients".

The people of Waveney know that their legitimate anxieties are treated by the government with a cynical contempt that is breathtaking. The fact that this is the pattern of deliberate erosion of local democracy, and that it is being replicated throughout Britain in all our valued public services, makes it all the more terrifying.

Eric Swainson
Beccles
Suffolk

Dodging the facts

Sadly, the advice proffered by A Sivanandan ("Race against time", 15 October), that the defeat of racism can come only from the local communities that give it birth, is rather soiled in this instance by the reiteration of the left's lies about local Liberal Democrats. As it errs in its analysis of the phenomenon, so in this instance has it expediently dodged the facts and selectively promoted an alternative mythology of political convenience.

The only racism generated by "expediency" had been that dreamt up by our political opponents, whose vested interests are always in ignoring pressures and choices confronting the local council, and in portraying every issue as a racial one. The idea of using a boat to house homeless people was born of a desire to cut costs and improve conditions (who's for bed and breakfast?), and was not scuppered because of any outcry but because, in the end, it was clearly not practical.

Our use of "intentional homeless" is, and was, no different from every other council up and down the country. The heads of the families concerned had *not* lived and worked here for between 16 and 28 years; in fact, they were not

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settled in this country at all. The investigations by the Commission for Racial Equality were not "subsequent"; they pre-dated the Lib Dem administration and drew conclusions about the policies and practices of our Labour predecessors.

Finally, the "housing priority" given to sons and daughters of existing residents has been to the extent of precisely 2 per cent of total lettings in the four years to this March. Some priority.

Just as A Sivanandan excoriates the BBC for eschewing the available facts, so he should take to heart the lesson he urges on us all. To root our deeds in the local community will be futile if they are bedded in falsehoods.

Councillor Jeremy Shaw (Liberal Democrats)
Bethnal Green Neighbourhood
London E2

Ideological absurdity

I endorse every word of Nicolas Walter's letter (19 November) in response to Agnes Fletcher's depressingly simplistic article on the brave new world of disabled activism ("Fighting for the right to be different", 29 October).

In the last couple of years I have interviewed over 40 more or less severely disabled "polios" on both sides of the Atlantic for a partly oral history of epidemic polio, which I have just completed (sorry, Ms Fletcher, to define them/us by their impairment, but no one I spoke to objected, any more than I do).

Ranging in age from thirty-something to eighty-something, these people were as richly various as any cross-section of society. Some were activist, some were not. Far from resenting being "divided into impairment groups", polios have sought out one another—particularly in America, where the spectre of post-polio syndrome looms large—and formed support groups to counter the new threat to their health. This doesn't necessarily isolate them from people with other disabilities, as Fletcher argues, or indeed from the non-disabled. In fact, polios have been in the forefront of the movement to improve the social conditions of disabled people generally.

Nicolas Walter is right to expose the ideological absurdity of "disablism"; apartheid is undesirable in whatever guise it appears. Besides, as an old trade unionist friend of mine was wont to say, "You catch more flies with honey than with vinegar."

Tony Gould
Newton Abbot
Devon

Pride out of prejudice

Nicolas Walter (Letters, 19 November) says the disability movement must recognise that impairment, as well as disability, affects our lives. But he obviously fails to understand the difference between the two. Impairment refers to the functional limitations we experience because of the way our bodies work, or don't work. Disability, on the other hand, refers to the attitudinal and environmental barriers that people with impairments experience. Disability is thus the oppression, in the way that sexism and racism are. My inability to walk is an inevitable part of the damage that has been done to my spinal cord; my inability to go to most places non-disabled people go to is the result of socially created barriers, and is not therefore inevitable.

Our pride as disabled people comes from the strength created by collective struggle against prejudice and discrimination, a strength that is fuelled by our assertion that our lives have value.

Jenny Morris
London N5

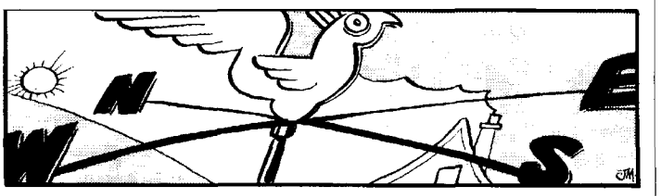
THIS ENGLAND

£5 for all entries printed below. Entries on a POSTCARD please

• The night supervisor at the tube station where a body remained undiscovered for eight days has been sacked. Gary Botterall was dismissed 24 hours after the man's body was discovered in the women's lavatory at Leytonstone station.

However, an Underground spokesman today denied that the sacking was linked to the delay in finding the body. Mr Botterall had been dismissed "because he failed to record lost property properly", he said.—*Evening Standard*
(Brenda Rowe)

FRINGE BENEFITS



A threnody for "English eccentric" May Alice Savidge from **Colin Ward**

We only learned that Miss May Alice Savidge had died when we saw a news item on our local TV network, about her nephew, Tony Adams, and his wife, Christine, taking over her house at Wells-next-the-Sea on the north Norfolk coast. They showed us the clutter, her collection of old matchboxes, and played a record of Albert W Ketelby's "In A Monastery Garden" on her wind-up gramophone. "She could never throw anything away," explained Christine.

Indeed, she couldn't, and what made her famous was that she couldn't bear to see her home thrown away either. When the Polish film-makers Witold and Danuta Stok made their film *Miss Savidge* in 1984, she explained to them that, surely, "it's not right to live in a house that someone else could live in. I mean if you've already got one, it seems a bit wasteful, doesn't it?" Her story is told, with all its ironies and overtones, in Patrick Wright's book from 1985, *On Living in an Old Country*, and we've often seen bits of it in newspaper features about the eccentricity of the English.

She lived in half of an ancient building at Ware in Hertfordshire, which turned out to be a medieval hall house. In the fifties, a new road was planned and her house turned out to be the site of a roundabout. By the late sixties, compulsory purchase became imminent, so drawing on her experience as a draughtswoman at De Havilland's aircraft factory during the war, she measured her oak-framed house, and numbered the pieces bit by bit. She explained to Wright that, since aircraft had hardly any right angles, "she was well-prepared when it came to mapping her equally erratic pre-technological house", and then to dismantling it.

Having bought a plot at Wells, she had her home shipped there in 11 lorry-loads, and from 1969 lived on the site in a caravan with her dog and cats, re-erecting her pre-Elizabethan home. Finally, in her late seventies, she moved in. When millionaires do this kind of thing, it is seen as the privilege of wealth. When open-air museums do it, they are praised for rescuing our heritage of vernacular architecture from destruction. But when Savidge did it, she was just an amiable nutty spinster.

The Polish film about her was shown at the Wells Centre in windy Norfolk on 5 May 1985. Savidge turned up, bringing some silvery pods of Honesty from her garden for Witold Stok. Patrick Wright went there too, and heard a woman complain that "while this story was all very splendid, it would be a disaster if everyone behaved in this way: any more Miss Savidges and the value of property in Wells would surely start to fall."

A man rose to say that he had recently driven through Ware and found that the land where Savidge's house once stood was still unused, there was no roundabout. "Rousing stuff indeed," noted Wright, but Savidge made clear to him a few weeks later that the road had gone ahead and the land had been used.

Wright evoked with remarkable sensitivity the world-view of May Alice Savidge. She'd been to a series of lectures at the Ware branch of the Workers Educational Association about the glories of medieval carpentry (there are similar courses in Essex, Suffolk and Norfolk) and she understood how ancient building skills had been forgotten, but that the joints, mortices and tenons that put moveable structures together could be readily understood.

She remembered, too, that the man from the council had agreed that her house was indeed one of the oldest buildings in Ware, "and cited this as proof that it should come down". But there were a lot of other things in her life, like the St John's Ambulance Brigade. When she moved house, she found that the Wells branch had been closed down "because it no longer made sense in the national terms of corporate strategy". Just like her, really.

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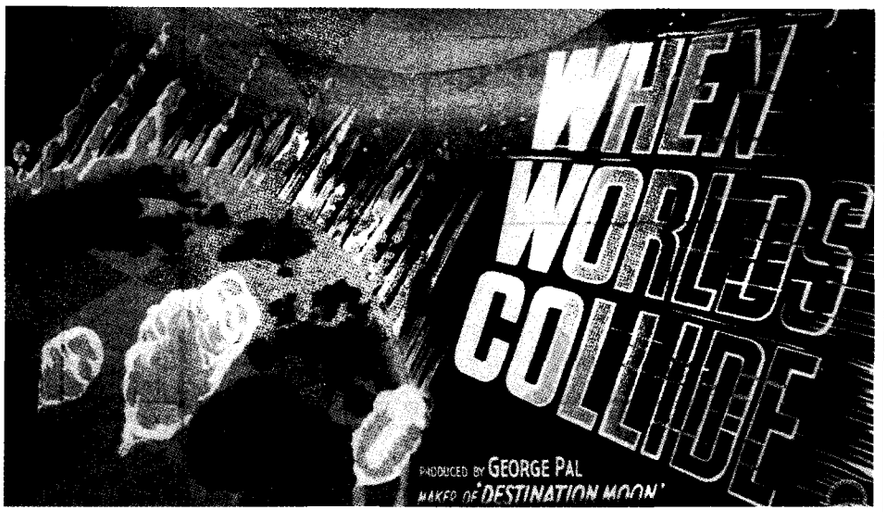

"When Worlds Collide", 1951, The Ronald Grant Archive

Are we here because of intervention from the heavens? What are the chances of it happening again? **Pat Coyne** looks at questions of asteroids and evolution

When worlds collide

Eat your heart out, Guy Fawkes. The biggest fireworks display ever seen is due to take place in July next year, when the hitherto obscure comet, Shoemaker-Levy 9, collides with the planet and expires in a shower of Catherine wheels, Roman candles and thunderflashes, with an estimated explosive power of several million megatons of TNT.

Relax, at least if you are reading this on Earth. The planet in question is Jupiter, although Jovians could be forgiven for being somewhat less sanguine about the prospect. Even for a planet as big as Jupiter, 11 times larger in diameter, over 1,000 times in volume and 300 times as heavy as Earth, the collision will be no fleabite. Fireballs as hot as the Sun will rise high into the Jovian atmosphere and the flash from the collision may light up Jupiter's four large satellites, millions of kilometres away. The whole planet, in the words of MIT astronomer Tim Dowling will "ring like a bell".

Bells are ringing, too, in the astronomical world, with a host of institutes turning their attention to the forthcoming spectacular in what, according to *Nature,* looks like becoming "the largest campaign in the history of modern astronomy". The space probes, Voyager 2, now way out beyond the orbit of Neptune, and the Jupiter-bound Galileo, together with the orbiting Hubble telescope and ground-based observatories, will be coordinated to track every aspect of both comet and planet between now and collision.

So why all this interest in events on a faraway planet of which we know (comparatively) little? First, its rarity value. This sort of impact occurs once in a millennium. Certainly nothing like it has been observed in modern times. It may give astronomers, for the first time, tangible evidence of the nature of Jupiter's lower atmosphere and possibly of the surface of the planet itself. Unlike the four smaller, inner planets (Mercury, Venus, Earth and Mars), which are dense balls of rock surrounded by a relatively thin atmospheric veil, the outer planets have enormously deep, thick atmospheres, comprised mainly of hydrogen, helium, methane and ammonia, surrounding much smaller cores, whose exact size and composition is still something of a mystery. The impact is likely to send materials from the lower atmosphere and planetary surface up to the top of Jupiter's atmosphere, perhaps creating another giant marking, like the planet's legendary Great Red Spot, a huge oval blotch, with an area greater than that of the Earth, that first appeared last century and still persists.

The second reason for the interest in the event is that asteroid impact has become fashionable as an explanation for certain events back here on Earth. In particular, it is becoming almost the conventional wisdom that the dinosaurs were wiped out by a huge asteroid colliding with Earth about 65 million years ago. Comet Shoemaker-Levy 9's rendezvous with Jupiter could be seen as a distant echo of their fate and a reminder that the same thing could happen to humanity.

But is it true? Is the Earth subject to periodic collisions that have had catastrophic effects on life? The jury is still out, but it has to be admitted that the evidence is impressive—and still accumulating. Certainly the Earth is continually bombarded by debris from space—several tons of it every day. Most is microscopic dust grains, which become visible as meteors when they burn up in the upper atmosphere. A very few make it to earth as meteorites, mostly as pebble-sized fragments, but very occasionally the odd boulder falls from the heavens. The largest known is an estimated 65-tonne lump of rock found in Africa.

None, except the very largest, would much trouble a single brontosaur, let alone put paid to the whole saurian host. Nor has history recorded a single human death from meteorite strike. However, we know that the Earth has been hit by much larger bodies in the past. The craters evident on the Moon, Mars, Mercury and satellites of other planets show them to have been struck repeatedly by massive objects. Weathering and vegetation fairly rapidly obscure the most obvious evidence of such craters on earth but even so, an increasing number of ancient impact craters are being identified. The best known is probably Meteor Crater in Arizona, a 1.2km-diameter hole produced by a meteorite that fell about 50,000 years ago. Eugene Shoemaker of the US Geological Survey (and of the Jupiter-bound comet) has estimated that a body big enough to make a 10km crater hits earth roughly every 110,000 years, one big enough to make a 30km hole every 1.2 million years and a monster capable of blasting out a hole 150km or more across arrives about every 100 million years.

Suggestions that the dinosaurs may have been killed off by asteroid collision have been made periodically, but the modern recrudescence of the idea began with, the discovery by Luis Alvarez in 1980, that the geological boundary between the Cretaceous era, the last age of dinosaurs, and the present Tertiary, 65 million years ago, is marked by a very thin layer of rock rich in the element iridium. Iridium is very rare on Earth but much more common in meteorites. Alvarez suggested it came from the remains of a huge meteorite and implicated it in the mass extinctions, not just of dinosaurs but of a large number of other animals, as well as plants, that occurred at the end of the Cretaceous era.

The evidence that a giant impact coincided with the end of the Cretaceous is strong. Even the likely impact site has been identified. This month it was revealed that Chicxulub crater on the Yucatan coast of Mexico, most of whose walls are now buried beneath 1,000 metres of limestone, was originally nearly 300km across. It was, according to the scientists who studied it, the biggest impact "since the development of multicellular life approximately a billion years ago".

Quite how it could have produced mass extinctions, and their apparently highly selective nature, is somewhat more problematic. Some variation of the "nuclear winter" theme still seems favourite, with the dust thrown up by the impact obscuring sunlight for years or even decades, preventing plant photosynthesis and leading to mass starvation, particularly of large animals. That does not explain, however, why all dinosaurs, which ranged in

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size from huge down to chicken-sized and smaller, were wiped out, while other, apparently equally vulnerable, large reptiles, like crocodiles and tortoises, survived. Nor is it even clear whether dinosaurs disappeared very suddenly or died out gradually.

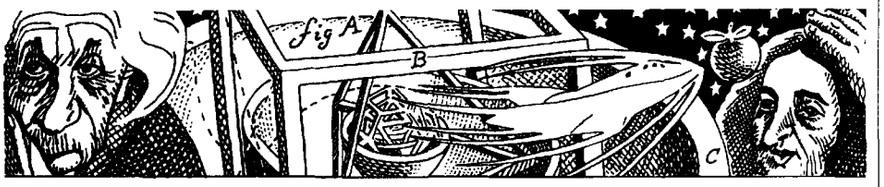
Despite the lack of identification of a specific mechanism, there is a growing acceptance that meteorite impacts may be implicated in at least some mass extinctions, in which large numbers of species appear to have died out simultaneously. There have been at least five such events since the beginning of the Cambrian, about 600 million years ago, when multicellular life first appeared. Geologists have discovered iridium anomalies, and evidence that rocks have been subjected to sudden massive shock, in a number of strata marking extinctions. Some have also been linked chronologically to ancient impact craters, although geological dating can only be approximate. One problem, however, is that there is no evidence of any meteorite connection with the mother of all mass extinctions, at the end of the Permian, 230 million years ago, when upwards of 90 per cent of all species disappeared and life itself may well have had a close call.

Some palaeontologists, like David Raup, from the University of Chicago, go further, arguing that meteorites may be a major cause, if not *the* major cause of all extinctions. Raup, in his book *Extinction: bad genes or bad luck*, uses the data gathered by Shoemaker to derive an "extinction-impact curve" suggesting that the mass extinctions (70 per cent-plus of species disappearing) occur at roughly 100 million year intervals and are due to impacts producing craters of 150km or more across. Lesser extinctions, produced by smaller meteorites, happen more frequently and the smallest extinction events (5 per cent species loss) occur about every million years, with craters of around 30km.

Raup turns the normal, Darwinian paradigm on its head, arguing that extinction, not speciation (the creation of new species), is the driving force of evolution. Left to itself, he suggests, speciation would increase biodiversity up to some saturation level. After that it would be forced to stop. Only extinctions could create space for more new species. We are here, it seems, because of interventions from the heavens.

You can, of course, have too much of a good thing. Some scientists have, not unnaturally, turned their attentions to warding off the next cosmic thunderbolt. Inevitably, the first suggestion has been nuclear weapons, but a more imaginative idea was been put forward last week by Jay Melosh of the University of Arizona. A giant mirror orbiting Earth would be focused on the incoming asteroid and the resulting jets of vaporised material would cause it to be deflected from its collision course. Some doubts have, however, been expressed. As astronomer Carl Sagan pointed out, it might be turned, accidentally or purposefully, on Earth itself, or even used to deflect an asteroid that was going to miss Earth on to the territory of an enemy. A tricky one.

DIELECTRICS



"Not a lot of people know that." **Pat Coyne** on a trio of unconventional theories

The contrarian in me delights in stumbling across some scientific claim that not only confounds conventional wisdom but, whether true or not, is bound to get up somebody's nose. Leafing through a few recent issues of that excellent magazine *New Scientist*, I came across at least three items that qualify on both counts. First, smoking prevents brain disease; second, pets combat heart attacks; and third, menstruation evolved as a form of protection against men.

What I like about them is their iconoclasm, their "in yer face" approach. Ian Mundell, for example begins, "You would have to be stupid not to have realised by now that smoking kills." It helps to kill 68,000 Britons a year by heart disease and lung cancer alone, to say nothing of complicating a whole host of other ailments. But, says Mundell, there is also evidence that smokers suffer less from brain disorders, like Parkinson's and Alzheimer's diseases, and there appears also to be some protective effect against ulcerative colitis, rheumatoid arthritis and even some cancers. Epidemiological studies of US military veterans, for example, showed that smokers are about 50 per cent less likely to develop Parkinson's disease than non-smokers.

Yet the stigma now attached to smoking has meant that researchers and funding bodies have largely failed to follow up the evidence. The same sort of reaction was described by John Duffy of Edinburgh University's Alchohol Research Group, about the evidence that alchohol protects against heart disease (see "Drinking your health", *NSS*, 17 September) The protective effect of smoking, if it exists, seems to be connected with nicotine and the way it can react with acetylcholine, one of the chemicals vital to the way brain cells relay impulses. The presence of nicotine may help to stop brain cells deteriorating. Mundell quotes Jeremy Gray, a professor at London's Institute of Psychiatry, as saying, "If the same information was available about any other compound it would have been headline news a decade ago." Even the tobacco companies, it seems, are reluctant to get in on the act because they fear it would confirm the dependence-inducing effects of nicotine. They just want to sell tobacco.

Can pets be good for your health too? What with the risk of toxoplasmosis and toxocariasis from the thousand tonnes of faeces and five million litres of urine deposited every day by the nation's cats and dogs, to say nothing of such pet-related diseases as psittacosis, salmonella, asthma and maybe even rabies, one could be forgiven for being sceptical. And, given the gushing sentimentality with which so many people treat their pets, it would be only just if they turned out to be plague carriers. Yet, according to Gail Vines, research now indicates that having a pet can lower your chances of having a heart attack by about 4 per cent. Not only that, but researchers at Cambridge University, discovered that, just months after acquiring a cat or dog, people suffered less from perennial health problems like headache, backache, constipation and flu.

This is not, says Vines, simply because pet owners get more exercise by taking their charges for walks. Rather, pets seem to have some soothing effect, which improves physical, as well as mental, wellbeing. "Pets listen and seem to understand, but do not evaluate." It's the sort of relationship psychiatrists love to develop. One American psychiatrist, Barry Levinson, noticed that severely withdrawn children, who refused to talk to him, made instant rapport with his dog, Jingles. He was able to make contact by insinuating himself into the child-dog relationship. One suspects the kids were better off with Jingles.

Unlike pets, men are bad for women's health. That much is sure. Just look, for example, at the statistics for cervical cancer for married women and nuns. Now, Margie Profet, a biologist at Berkeley in California, suggests that menstruation has evolved to combat infections carried into the womb by sperm. The conventional explanation is that the endometrium, the blood-rich lining of the womb, is laid down afresh every month to receive a fertilised ovum, and is shed if none arrives. This argues Profet, makes little sense, since all those nutrients are very costly. Why not simply resorb them?

Instead, she suggests, menstruation is the price female mammals pay for internal fertilisation, which allows entry not just to sperm but to bacteria that cling to the sperm's neck and tail. The whole of the endometrium is shed because it may be infected, and menstrual blood, replete with immune cells, takes care of any residual infection. However, it is not clear whether mammals other than higher primates (apes) menstruate. Profet says they do, but, for many, blood does not leave the vagina. Nor does it explain the suppression of menstruation during lactation (No sex please, we're breastfeeding?). But for all that, Profet's theory is ingenious, the more so since it explains menstruation in rational, evolutionary terms, as an adaptation rather than simply an inconvenience—"the curse". I predict we'll hear more of it.

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THE PLURAL EVENT

Andrew Benjamin's work has been influential on critical thinking about aesthetics and politics. Arguing for the central importance of repetition and ontology, his new book, *The Plural Event: Descartes, Hegel, Heidegger* (Routledge) asks how, within the context of repetition, can there be the occurrence of something new? What allows for the new, Benjamin argues, is the plural event. He unravels his ideas in conversation with **Joanna Hodge**, author of *Heidegger and Ethics*, and **Simon Critchley**, author of *The Ethics of Deconstruction* (Blackwell). Tickets £5.50 (£4.50 ICA Members)

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Vanguard of a teaching revolution: Kenneth Branagh's "Much Ado About Nothing"

Teachers of English need not choose between Shakespeare and soap opera. **Colin MacCabe** argues that media studies can help save a fading literary tradition

Look here, upon this picture

This Friday and Saturday, the National Film Theatre will be full of people discussing the future of the teaching of English. The setting, a cinema, may seem incongruous for a discussion of the teaching of books, but this incongruity may belong more to the past than the future.

Film, and more recently television, have been routinely vilified throughout the 20th century as the antithesis of education and the enemy of literature. Any Conservative politician who wants a bellow of applause from his audience has merely to ask this rhetorical question: whether we want our children learning about soap operas or Shakespeare, and then provide the predictable response.

But there can be few more dangerous *idées reçues* than the notion that somehow we have to choose between the literary tradition and the contemporary media. If that were the choice, then we're probably all doomed to end up like Mr Major—who by all reports spends a great deal of attention on the media and embarrassingly little on literature. The question we have to ask is what relation we want our children to have to the literary tradition, and how contemporary media can contribute to that relation.

In some ways, this is the question that the Cox report on the teaching of English did not ask. Its treatment of language was detailed and sophisticated. It produced a radical form of cultural nationalism, which celebrated the variety of forms of spoken English while insisting on the need for the teaching of a common written standard. It reversed 300 years of prejudice against all those who did not speak in the approved accents of the ruling class, while rejecting 30 years of foolishness which suggested that all forms of language were equally appropriate for all occasions.

This sophistication completely disappeared in the discussion of literature. There were general statements about the importance of narrative and drama and a ritual obeisance towards Shakespeare, but no real attempt to set out what it was that children should know about their literary past.

I suspect that the reason for this silence was a conscious or unconscious embarrassment. If one believes that most children should have some knowledge of the development of English literature from Shakespeare to the present day and one also knows the reality of today's classrooms, then silence may be an appealing option.

The simple fact is that most of the literary tradition is quite simply unavailable to most children. The knowledge of Christianity and the Authorised Version assumed by most literature up to D H Lawrence, and the familiarity with classical myth which is essential to reading pre-Romantic literature, are esoteric knowledge for the vast majority of contemporary children.

Even more serious, however, is the fact that the language of even 19th-century literature is fantastically difficult for most contemporary speakers of English. The development in radio, television and recorded sound of what Walter J Ong calls "secondary orality" has led to a simplification of sentence structure which means that any kind of periodic sentence presents difficulties of comprehension.

If we look in more detail at past educational history, we will find that the numbers who achieved a real engagement with the literary tradition was always small. However, it is now infinitesimal.

At this point one can turn to the contemporary media as part of the solution, rather than as part of the problem. This solution has two very different elements, which must not be confused, although both lead to the conclusion that literature should now be taught in the context of media studies.

The first is that the media can provide the general concepts with which children can approach the literary tradition, which is now close to unreadable on its own terms. In collaboration with a large number of pupils and teachers, the British Film Institute has pro-

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duced a Primary Media Education curriculum statement. It expects all children aged 11 to be able to understand the following concepts: media agencies (who is communicating and why), media categories (what type of text is it), media technologies (how do we know what it means), media audiences (who receives it and what sense do they make of it) and media representation (what is the relation between text and reality).

These concepts are easily graspable by children from their own vast knowledge of film and televison. They provide a series of questions that children can ask of any literary text, and which begin to place it within a comprehensible context.

Second, the media can provide the first access to the literary text in the form of an adaptation. Anyone who has taught an introductory Renaissance course including *Edward II* and *Henry IV*, parts 1 and 2, and then taught the same course using Derek Jarman's film of the Marlowe play, Gus van Sant's *My Own Private Idaho* and Orson Welles' *Chimes at Midnight* will know that the experience is transformative.

It is not simply that the films stimulate an interest in the texts which the texts by themselves cannot. They also allow the class to regard the texts as material that can be worked on, rather than cultural monuments unapproachable in their seamless and incomprehensible unity.

My argument assumes both that we should have a national curriculum and that the literary tradition must be central to it. But there are many who would argue that the "national" itself is a form that should be superseded, as we work towards more global and local forms of organisation. If the old national cultures are dissolving, then we should simply welcome that dissolution and make no effort to replace them.

This argument simply ignores the continuing political reality of nations. If both economics and culture may seem to march at a more global pace, politics remains firmly (indeed, in the aftermath of the cold war, more firmly) rooted at the level of the nation. If we fail to struggle for the national culture we want, we may find that the national culture that we get will have permed past and future in ways we find actively disagreeable.

More importantly, nations find their definition in continuities both cultural and natural. They do not disappear in increasing globalisation. The question of whether we can develop national cultures which both genuinely represent continuities with the past and which are yet more open to changing compositions in the present is not some ideal theoretical speculation, but a matter of life and death. We can neither simply ignore, nor stupidly repeat, the nations we have inherited.

The British Film Institute/"Times Educational Supplement" Commission of Inquiry into English is at the NFT on 26-27 November: sessions start at 10am and cost £10 per day. Colin MacCabe is head of research at the BFI and professor of English at the University of Pittsburgh

Jonathan Romney asks why rap movies replay gangsta clichés

Chill out with the icemen

They used to say that a subcultural phenomenon was dead as soon as it was parodied on TV or the Sunday supplements got hold of it. That may have been the case once, but it stopped being true some short time after punk—probably the last major youth culture that caught the media industry on the hop.

Never again would a sudden eruption of energy and imagery be allowed to slip by without being either assimilated or parodied while in its cradle. Hip-hop is an interesting case in point. For nearly a decade, its cultural domination has spread so wide—even infiltrating the hidebound white rock culture that resisted it for so long—that even its most fervent proponents long ago ceased to take it for granted as a force of insurrection. Individual acts may still muster all of rap's rhetorical weaponry, but from the start there have been enough cash-in merchants, second-raters and bluster jockeys around to turn the music rapidly into a limited repertoire of tattered tropes and worn-out iconography.

That's why *CB4* (Plaza 2 from 26 November) seems to have come along too late in the day. Or maybe it's just too late in rap's day. The film has been hailed as hip-hop's own *Wayne's World*, and it's as amiably innocuous as that—a story of well-meaning nerds getting in too deep but emerging older and (not that much) wiser.

The trio of the title are swaggering adepts of gangsta rap, wearing prison uniforms, modelling their stance on acts like NWA and their ex-member Ice Cube, and named after the cell block in which they supposedly did time. At the start of the film, a fawning Wasp documentary maker, A White, is giving them the star treatment, swooning at their every gesture: "A material act of defiance by rappers," he marvels, when one of them rips up a parking ticket.

Subsequently it's revealed that "The World's Most Dangerous Rappers" are a bunch of nerdy buffoons, who only a moment before had been sitting at home bullied by their kid sisters. Their spokesman MC Gusto (the amiably manic *Saturday Night Live* alumnus Chris Rock) has stolen his name and act from a real hard case, and it's only a matter of time before the imposters are rumbled.

The jokes are pretty obvious. A record company executive asks them, "Do you glorify violence? Do you defile women in your lyrics? Do you fondle your genitalia on stage?" and they reply, "Whenever posible"—which answer of course wins them the jackpot. It's tame parody, the sort that, for fear of *really* offending its targets, invites them to play along.

Hence the cameos by rappers Ice-T and Ice Cube, whose meaner-than-mean stance is supposedly what the film is parodying. It's the same logic that has stars turning up on *Saturday Night Live* to collude in their own lampooning, and that makes British politicians so inordinately proud of being rubberised on *Spitting Image*.

Directed by Tamra Davis, *CB4* is a sluggish, sophomoric effort, more like *Mad* magazine than real satire. Sharper by far is a similar squib that's just run at the London Film Festiveal, *Fear of a Black Hat*, which someone really should release here fast. It's created by and stars Rusty Cundieff, a graduate of the Spike Lee academy (he was in *School Daze*). Where *CB4* is *Wayne's World, Black Hat* is more like *This is Spinal Tap*, with all that implies about being funnier and more acute.

The fact that the entire film is done as a fake documentary (made this time by a sceptical black woman director) gives the humour a distance that allows its subjects to carve themselves up. The band NWH (Niggaz With Hats) try to be hyper-cool and never slip out of their earnest pose, whereas CB4 are openly played as black Jerry Lewises. *Black Hat* wins out for overall smartness, and gets an extra lead by points for a very funny piss-take of the mystico-rappers PM Dawn.

What is remarkable, though, is that the same jokes are common to both films. Both bands

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Telling the white media what they want to hear: "CB4"

are inept gangsta posers taken seriously by the media and demonised by the moral right; both come from the archetypal bad side of town (CB4 hail from Locash, NWH from "Tough Neighbourhood USA"); both perform lame-brain anthems—respectively "Sweat on my Balls" and "Suck My Dee Asterisk Cee Kay". Are there really so few jokes in rap culture that they have to be shared?

That may be the case, and that in fact may be *CB4*'s main regret. The film starts with a curiously poker-faced credit sequence. The camera scans contemplatively over a decade's worth of rap memorabilia—sleeves, posters and hats commemorating the Fat Boys, Run DMC, Grandmaster Flash, and, further back, funk precursors such as Parliament. Look at rap's rich tapestry, it seems to say . . . and then look at this—and gives us CB4's idiot bad-boy posturing. *CB4* is produced and co-written by Nelson George, an acute commentator on black music who has bemoaned its descent from the golden age of Motown and R&B.

What *CB4* is complaining about, albeit ineffectively, is the depleted iconography in today's dominant black music, the too-persistent recourse to machismo and inner-city nihilism. But if the images of gangsta rap have become an easy-to-use template in music, its effect is also being felt in cinema. *Menace II Society* by tyro directors the Hughes Brothers, released in the New Year, is a strict re-run of the ground-breaking *Boyz'N'The Hood* bolstered by tough-guy imagery. Like John Singleton's film and the recent Oliver Stone-produced *South Central*, *Menace II Society* works over the now familiar theme of the impressionable boy brought low by urban deprivation, lack of education and the absence of strong father figures, all of which seems to destine them inexorably to gun law.

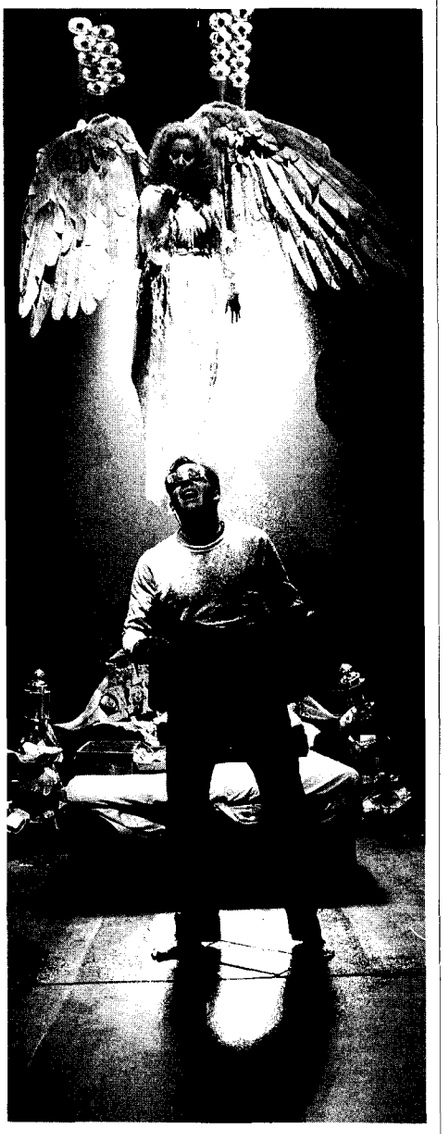
Menace shows how easy it is to click to automatic pilot once you look for inspiration to gangsta narrative. The airless feel of the film comes not so much from the claustrophobic milieu as from the easy assumption that such work can get by passing itself off as "how it is" reportage—which has always been the common argument about the lyrics of Ice-T and the West-Coast hardman school.

It's possible to take other things from rap than behavourial codes and a quicksilver pace. Films could profitably pick up on its function as a bulletin board. Public Enemy notably turn their records into extended commentaries on their own media coverage. Leslie Harris' *Just Another Girl on the IRT*, for all its considerable flaws, was powerfully aware of the dialogue element in rap, which was why its smart-girl sexual politics got across with some force. Rather than "this is how it is", it asked, "How do *you* think it is?"

Fear of the Black Hat may seem to have little to do with state-of-things reportage, but it's more revealing about rap culture and its stereotypes than *Menace* could ever be. Its wise-acre flippancy resists the deadness of the open-and-shut case.

Andy Lavender watches gay theatre break out of the ghetto

Cottage industry



Angelic upstarts: Stephen Dillane in "Perestroika"

It may be coincidence, but a clutch of shows suggests that "gay theatre" is now more firmly in the mainstream than ever before. The inverted commas are there because we must treat the term with high suspicion. But more of that later.

Perestroika, the second part of Tony Kushner's *Angels in America*, opened at the National Theatre last week. It carries on where *Millennium Approaches* left off, following the same characters—some of them gay, variously in and out of the closet—through an epic story touching on Aids, Mormonism and Republicanism.

The Royal Court, meanwhile, played host to *MSM*, a physical-theatre piece by DV8 exploring the pastime of cottaging (anonymous sexual encounters between men in public toilets). This has been followed on the Court's main stage by *Night After Night*, written and directed by Neil Bartlett, which opened at this year's Edinburgh Festival (see *NSS*, 3 September). The show concentrates in part on the backstage lives of a 1950s musical chorus, homosexuals to a man. By delicious irony, they earn their money playing cowboys, sailors and the like in rampantly heterosexual storylines.

For all their differences, each of these shows points at the divisions between gay and straight culture and suggests that the lines between the two are somewhat blurred. Nothing new here: gay theatre has been blowing society's gaff on this for some years now. What they also depict, however, is a fantasy space in which characters escape from the grim realities of the present and discover (albeit temporarily) a more exciting life for themselves.

This is explicit in *MSM*. "Cottaging's a fantasy zone, and it's cheap," says one character. Testimonies like this come from the 50 interviews the company conducted with men who cottage, which form the basis for the show's text. The set is all moving urinals, cubicles and wall-like screens, from which performers swing and jump, and through which they poke oddly dismembered limbs. This is not contemporary dance; rather a physicalised expression of masculine loitering, prowling and enticing.

Director Lloyd Newsom commented on this marriage of text and physicality in a recent interview in *Plays International*. "We had reached a point where we became frustrated with pure movement," he says of DV8's work, "and found that we had a need for words. As a company we want to be experimental." What a sign of the contradictory times, when experiment means reclaiming the text!

As it is, the confessional fragments are both a strength and a limitation of the piece. They give it a documentary seaminess but at the same time impose a kind of inevitability. Oddly, in a show which is so stylised, once you have seen ten minutes there is little left to reveal. Much is made of the dullness of the whole business (as one character says, "the greatest part of cottaging is waiting"); and much less of the illicit thrill that presumably motivates this particular leisure activity.

"Rather than a gay agenda there's an emotional agenda attached to it," said Newson. That is indeed the case, but the prevailing emotional tone is one of jaded sadness. A topic that must initially have seemed to offer a covert peek at sex and gender, in fact surrenders little more than a set of visual pictures of lavatory life.

Lack of scope is not a charge you could fling at *Perestroika*. Viewing it along with *Millennium Approaches*, one is struck by the verbosity of both plays. It is as well that Kushner's

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language, to say nothing of his scene-settings, has great poetic charge.

Millennium Approaches ended with Aids-infected Prior Walter seeing an angel in a mock extravagant, "very Steven Spielberg" finale: the moment of death, perhaps, or at the very least a deliverance from life. In *Perestroika,* it turns out that this is a hallucinatory vision, which marks Prior out as someone undergoing HIV-derived delusions or as a prophet for the 20th-century's *fin de siècle.* Needless to say, it is a little of both.

According to Kushner, "*Perestroika* was intended to be partly an exploration of the question of hope, and of where one can locate hope in a very desperate time". The search takes him into a libidinal fantasy zone: this is the "threshold of revelation", as one character calls it; now heaven, now hallucination. It opens the play up for expansive philosophising in Kushner's witty-bitter New York tone.

It is not surprising if the mix of social comment, political disputation and spiritual quest boils over at times. But Kushner aims high, and in the play's most telling moments he does capture the energies of his age, bursting with contradictions.

Roy Cohn, for instance, ultra-hawkish Republican lawyer and covert homosexual, is by this time hospitalised with Aids. One of the play's great jokes is to have him nursed by the flagrantly camp Belize, a black queen who mops his brow and swaps acid repartee. Belize offers to take someone to see Cohn. "I'll show you America," he says. "Terminal, mean and crazy."

There are some fine performances in Declan Donnellan's swift-moving production. Not least among equals is Stephen Dillane, who hobbles around as the stricken Prior, reaching into a fervid inner world in order to cope with his gradual departure from this one. But it is not a departure; for *Perestroika* finishes less ambivalently than its predecessor.

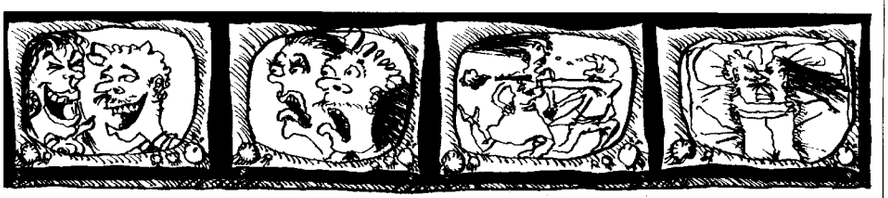
Walter, with his friends, is before his favourite statue (an angel, of course). He talks to the audience, an address that incorporates those who do not have Aids—by implication, an inclusive human community. "More life! The great work begins!" is his final cry. It is an assertive end to seven hours' worth of theatre and there is something to be said for Kushner refusing to have his character die. Death, in this play at least, is continually cheated.

Perestroika, like *Millennium Approaches*, is a gay play. But the term is limiting. It is no longer possible to talk of "gay theatre" as though it were somehow different and removed from the rest of theatre, somehow less relevant to the public at large.

Angels in America really does mark the entry of gay theatre into the mainstream consciousness, and the issues it addresses are all-encompassing. This isn't the end of the matter. It is easy to echo Prior's last line, and hope that the great work begins.

"Perestroika" continues at the Cottesloe Theatre; "Night After Night" opens at the Royal Court today (26 November)

JACI STEPHEN



So who did shoot JFK? ABC, Time-Life, Sky One, BBC2, Channel 4, old Abraham Zapruder and all

I was too young to register what I was doing when Kennedy's death was announced, but I'll certainly remember what I was doing in the week commemorating the 30th anniversary of the assassination: watching Kennedy programmes till they came out of my ears like . . . well, a bullet through the president's head. There is no detail missing from the drama, which is lodged in my brain like . . . Indeed, so vivid is that picture, I think I am beginning to remember what I was doing when the president was shot. I was dressed in pink, sitting beside my husband in a car driving towards the grassy knoll. The rest is autopsy.

Every aspect of the story has been deemed worthy of exhumation. Channel 4's breath-taking documentary *As It Happened: the killing of Kennedy* led the field with its minute-by-minute unfolding of the drama and its aftermath. On Sunday, BBC2 treated us to a Kennedy night, while Sky One has gone to town with the Kennedy season: a whole week mowing the grassy knoll.

BBC2 first brought us *Dear Jackie*, in which several of the million people who wrote to Jackie Kennedy after her husband's death described what had motivated them to do so. One woman had been in the Dallas crowd and said she had never again been able to wear the suit she had been wearing that day (neither would Jackie; every programme relished in the detail of Jack's brains exploding over his wife).

Gore Vidal followed with *JFK: A Personal Memory*, a straight-to-camera piece so lacklustre you could be forgiven for thinking we were back at the Dallas morgue. Things picked up again with *Timewatch*, which explored *The Mysterious Career of Lee Harvey Oswald*. The programme claimed to have unearthed new fingerprint evidence to show that Oswald was the sole assassin. Naturally, this comes as a bit of a dampener to those who still favour the conspiracy theory, but conspiracies are so popular that the one-man rifle idea now seems almost revolutionary.

Worried that more than 24 hours had elapsed since it last showed exploding brains, BBC2 returned to the subject on Monday with *The Zapruder Footage*. Abraham Zapruder was the man whose home-movie camera caught the assassination on film. When he wasn't shooting presidents, he "manufactured ladies' dresses" (as opposed to men's?). Zapruder sold the film to Time-Life, which sold the TV and film rights back to the family in 1975, though Zapruder was dead by then. They are now having the film put onto disc and will make a killing. Zapruder's footage, no matter how many times you see it, still makes compulsive viewing. Its power, said one contributor, "is akin to the power we expect from art".

That compulsiveness applies to the whole of the Kennedy onslaught. Just when you think you've seen it all, up pops something else and it's *still* fascinating. But there had to be an exception, and *JFK: Reckless Youth* (Sky One and The Movie Channel, Saturday, Sunday) was it.

ABC's 183-minute mini-series (Polone Co/Hearst Entertainment Production) was a length equivalent to the 22-second assassination footage multiplied 499.09 times, and it felt like it. It is rare for an actor (Patrick Dempsey) to play JFK: a dangerous thing to attempt when the reality was more dramatic than any story could ever be.

Reckless Youth did not reach 1963. Its focus was JFK's youth, when questions such as "Did you buy the movie company, daddy?" were the only signs of future greatness. JFK's early years were characterised by a lot of fist waving in response to Dad (Terry Kinney) crying "What are Kennedys?" ("Winners!") and "Kennedys don't fail."

For some reason, all this happened at mealtimes, which meant nobody got to eat anything. It was curiously reminiscent of *Dallas*, in which the whole of the Ewing clan would come to the table, sit down to a plate of kedgeree from the hot plate and fall out with at least two people before Miss Ellie had a chance to say "Fancy a chipolata, Clayton?"

When he was not trying to "put eggs into some girl's basket" and when he was not eating, the young Jack was trying to come to grips with Nazism: a philosophy that only went slightly awry when he wanted to put his eggs into some German girl's basket. Jack's lingo clearly came from his father's lessons in sexual etiquette (these took place over restaurant meals—bang went another prandial opportunity). "There's sex and there's marriage," Joe told Jack. "The two have nothing in common . . . Sex is an itch and there are plenty of women around who'll help you scratch it."

Alas, that only takes us to the end of part one. At this point, I sensed I was turning into a Kennedy bulimic and that so indulgent a period of gorging could only end in the bathroom. At the end of *Reckless Youth*, the question was not who shot Kennedy, but why ABC allowed this mob to try.

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The road to Waco?

PARADISE DREAMED: HOW UTOPIAN THINKERS HAVE CHANGED THE MODERN WORLD
Pamela Neville-Sington and David Sington
Bloomsbury, £18.99

Roy Porter

Do dreamers change the world? If so, do their dreams inevitably turn to Waco-like nightmares? This ambitious history of utopias raises such key issues, but the Singtons have perhaps bitten off more than they can chew. *Paradise Dreamed* offers a sequence of lucid expositions of the canonical utopian texts: Thomas More's *Utopia* itself, of course, but also preceding works, notably Plato's *Republic* and such key later blueprints as Bacon's *New Atlantis*, Fourier's *New World*, William Morris' *News From Nowhere* (with its remedievalised Hammersmith), B F Skinner's behaviourist *Walden Two* and others.

Nor do the Singtons confine themselves to ideas. They also examine bricks-and-mortar utopias, such as Oneida and the Owenite communities in the New World. Especially in the closing chapters, "dystopias" come into the picture, notably Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*, with its dissection of bureaucratic hedonism.

This, the unproblematic aspect of the book, makes for stimulating reading, because the Singtons skilfully pinpoint the vital preoccupations of utopia-mongers. They highlight the driving desire to forge an authentic community. That is why so many of yesterday's tomorrows take the form of an ideal *city*.

Communities, of course, suggest communism and the abolition of private property in the name of social justice. Increasingly common, from the Enlightenment, has been the goal of sexual liberation. Both Diderot's fantasy of Tahiti, the isle of free love, and Fourier's schedules for public orgies aimed to emancipate mankind from the ills of Christian asceticism.

Erotic liberty generally requires the elimination of the family; and from Plato onwards, utopian communities have often commandeered sex for social ends through eugenics, securing the future perfect by prescribed breeding. Most utopias having been penned by males. Not surprisingly, this has often meant polygamy. In their anatomy of utopias, the Singtons avoid the seductions of crude judgmentalism or psychobiography: the interpretation of utopian vision as projections of individual hang-ups.

The genre, however, poses puzzles that the Singtons don't really resolve, particularly if we are concerned with the status of utopian thinking today. What, at bottom, constitutes utopianism? What makes it fundamentally different from regular social criticism or any manifesto of the future? Does its essence lie in the fantasy element, thus inviting the reactionary put-down of "utopian" as applied to anyone who has got what George Bush called "the vision thing"?

Survivors of utopia? A Blackfoot "council" in the Glacier National Park; an obviously posed shot by the photographer Roland Reed in 1915. It comes from "The Shadow Catchers: images of the American Indian", compiled by Paula Richardson Fleming and Judith Lynn Luskey (Laurence King, £19.95)

Doubtless, utopias have been mooted by authors who never expected to see them implemented—who, indeed, did not want the realisation of ideas that were "thought experiments" rather than paradigm societies. Thomas More, the original utopian, was probably of that ilk. But others—St Simon, Fourier and the Owenites—expected the fulfillment of their shapes of things to come.

Is perfection, then, the core idea? Or does the heart of a utopia lie in the *tabula rasa*: a clean slate, a radically different order of things either in the future or at some major geographical remove (over the rainbow)? As Le Corbusier insisted, one must "build on a clear site". The Singtons are partial to this notion—that utopia is, at bottom, the blotting out of history, a "clean break with the past"—but they don't fully clarify the issue. One result is that there are some odd inclusions, including de Sade, while major utopian types have been left out, including almost the whole of today's science fiction—surely the most imaginative body of utopian writings ever.

These are not pedantic matters, for the label "utopian" is fraught with value judgments. Take Marx. Marx set himself up as a great adversary of utopianism; yet for the Singtons he is a prime specimen of the beast (though surely, the last thing Marx the historical materialist was doing was erasing history). Marx, of course, is commonly dubbed a utopian by those using the term disparagingly to denote a dogmatist whose woolly head has got the better of his heart, or worse, a monster of inhumanity. Ever since Burke, "utopian" has served the demonology of the right to denote a deluded idealist, by implication megalomaniac and psychopathic.

The Singtons flirt a bit with that position, maintaining in the later chapters that, in the name of virtue, justice or equality, the utopian mode readily becomes totalitarian, inimical to freedom and individuality. Rousseau's quixotic vision of the general will, they believe (following Talmon's *Origins of Totalitarian Democracy*), engendered French revolutionary terror, just as the Marxist dream later paved the way for Stalin. Utopia (one might declare, amending Madame Roland)—what crimes have been committed in thy name!

Utopianism, in this reading, comes to mean something akin to a fatal obsession with ideological purity or abstract logic at the expense of humanity. And, as is signalled by their subtitle, the Singtons are concerned with the practical reverberations of utopian schemes. For utopianism, they argue, has been more than philosophy seminars in the Athens sun; it has been the midwife of modern political realities.

Here they seem to offer contradictory messages. "Beware" signs are erected. Rather in the manner of Popper's *Open Society and its Enemies*, they warn that the road to hell may be paved with good utopias. Rousseauian or Marxist ideals of justice may have been noble, but look where they led. The politics of perfection must make way for the art of the possible. Yet the twist in the Singtons' tail is that they don't conclude with the hackneyed right-wing homily about the evils of ideology. They fly a flag for utopianism: visions are needed to leaven the lump; they give us goals and hope.

Large questions are thus raised about the relevance of utopianism today. Are utopians dreamers, or frustrated dictators? Is utopianism a blessing or a bane? Do all attempts to create heaven on earth end in Waco? This book does not solve these problems, not least because it does not trace the impact of utopian ideas rigorously enough. But in dark days when idealism has become a dirty word, the vision of More, Marx and Morris is heartening indeed.

Roy Porter is senior lecturer at the Wellcome Institute

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The big girls

FIRE WITH FIRE: NEW FEMALE POWER AND HOW IT WILL CHANGE THE 21ST CENTURY
Naomi Wolf
Chatto & Windus, £11.99

Melissa Benn

Absurdly over-hyped, *Fire with Fire* is the latest in a long line of high-energy, sweeping tomes by American feminists that everyone tells us overshadow our sour, small-minded, home-grown variety. But massive publicity of both book and author will ensure that they get out to millions of women looking hungrily (or lazily) for the text of their age. For that reason alone, it is important.

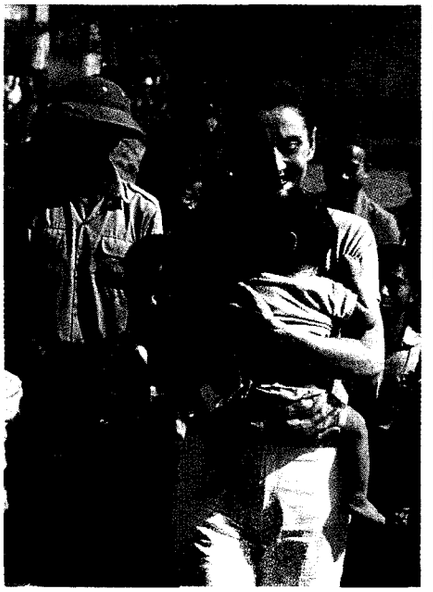
It is certainly the first feminist book of the Clinton era. Unashamedly, it welds the optimism of a new liberal consensus with what was learned from the dark 1980s: marketability, pragmatism and a fine-tuned sense of individual initiative, to be deployed on behalf of the unfortunate parts of the collective.

Women, says Wolf, are at an "open moment" in their history. They must simply step forward and claim the power that is theirs. Anita Hill's strange mix of humiliation and triumph on Capitol Hill was a pivotal moment. So was the election by proxy of Hillary Clinton. So too was the 1992 Year of the Woman. These *were* dramatic moments, but do they signify as much as Wolf claims? However important the Anita Hill experience, does it really signal a "genderquake" for all US women? Is a powerful president's wife so new a phenomenon, and even if she is, does Hillary Clinton mark much more than the new opportunities and dangers facing professional women?

But it is when Wolf turns to Britain, and the now customary "add-on" examples that American feminists insert in their books, that the limitations of both theory and *language* come home. Women in the 1984-5 miners strike were "brilliant entrepreneurs" when it came to raising money; Princess Diana is now an "assertive ambassador on the world stage"; Stella Rimington at MI5 is a new "power-feminist icon". "Get real" explode my notes in the margin at this point.

Each of these advances is noted without reference to context, emptied of any analysis. Like Susan Faludi's *Backlash*, whose defeatism she declares dated, Wolf deals almost entirely with popular culture's symbolic and synthetic advances and retreats. In this, she exhibits one of the crippling limitations of all post-feminisms.

Fire with Fire is above all concerned with the individual will. If it has any genre history or equivalent, it is the self-esteem handbook so popular in the last decade. So, the banner emotional headlines run: "Don't dwell on the negatives of the past; remove your blocks to fame, success and money; don't be afraid of criticism and above all, babe, go for it . . . " The call to agency is the most important and valuable part of Wolf's message, but it is not as new to feminism as she implies. *The Second Sex* is a far more profound and complex work on this theme. Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* placed principal emphasis on self-development. The main thrust of Camille Paglia's limited appeal comes from her urgings to women to throw off the shackles of female passivity. Wolf does not so much create as *codify*, in a new language, a shift of mood for a generation of backlash-angry, high-earning yet oddly unconfident women.



Another kind of heroine: the late Audrey Hepburn working for Unicef in Hanoi, from Robyn Karney's pictorial life of the actress-turned-philanthropist, "A Star Danced" (Bloomsbury, £18.99)

Yet like every generation, which must reassure itself that it will not repeat its mothers' mistakes, Wolf's message also involves a partial repudiation of "second-wave" feminism, that generation of women who came to adulthood in the 1960s and 1970s. While *The Beauty Myth* was more generous in paying its debts to this movement, *Fire with Fire* plays more to the mainstream gallery. Wolf wants to eat her cake and have it, honouring second-wave history and repudiating it at the same time. She merges it into a new synthesis, all her "1990s" own. So, we are assured: socialism is officially dead; sisterhood must make a "new alliance with capital". Power not victim feminism is the way forward.

I'd hate to be a poor slow sleepy human being in Naomi Wolf's world. There's no place for the sheer bloody ordinary, the woman neither victimised nor thrusting. Conflict, ambiguity, doing things differently, not playing the game: all the things that have been wonderful as well as terrible about feminism are thrown out from this grown-up wardrobe. Complex stories of socialism, radicalism and sexual liberation get boiled down in the eager pot of her simplification.

Perhaps this is why, for all its claims to modernity, *Fire with Fire* is curiously unreal, a work unanchored in "true" historical time and place. In fact, it's rather like a good TV film. I recognised the characters. I know most of the plot. I enjoyed watching it. But when I turn it off, it leaves no lingering trace in the outside world. Striving precisely to be so unifying and universal, it tells us too too little about real lives, real women. But then the Big American Girls so often do. Maybe that's precisely why so many people like them.

Melissa Benn is writing a book about the modern politics of mothers for Cape

Radical roots

WITNESS AGAINST THE BEAST: WILLIAM BLAKE AND THE MORAL LAW
E P Thompson
Cambridge University Press, £17.95

Terry Eagleton

Most of Edward Thompson's books had either a premature or belated birth. His massive work on William Morris arrived a whole year early: in its closing pages, Thompson speculates with his customary chin-leading panache that a modern Morris would most certainly have joined the Communist Party, and he resigned himself one year later over Hungary.

A *TLS* article on the 18th-century Black Acts by a conservative literary critic prematurely provoked him into the argument that was to become *Whigs and Hunters*. In 1950s Leeds, where Thompson taught in the extramural department, it belonged to local academic mythology that he was supposedly penning some mighty tome on the origins of the working class, which would of course never see the light of day. And this latest, sadly posthumous offering on William Blake was heralded well over a decade ago, before its author diverted his energies into the business of saving the world in which it might be received. It is no accident that an anti-nuclear campaigner should be drawn to Blake, who held that everything that lives is holy.

Witness against the Beast—a justifiably self-alluding title if ever there was one—plunges boldly into the jungle of mystical, millennarian, semi-underground subcultures in which Blake's work has its murky roots, and emerges with a frail thread linking the poet back to the dissenting world of the English 17th century. This, improbably enough, is the Muggletonian cult, a 300-year-old strain of religious radicalism whose doctrines parallel Blake's own, and whose last survivor was discovered by Thompson alive and well and living in Tunbridge Wells.

The connection, as Thompson acknowledges, is a mite hypothetical. In this densely tangled history of Ranters, Hermeticists, Gnostics and Fifth Monarchy Men, it's hard to say with any assurance just who gave birth to what. Indeed, Thompson is able mischievously to announce his "definitive finding" that Blake *wasn't* actually a card-carrying

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Muggletonian, having scoured the church's membership files. But he ploughs on energetically through this well-nigh impassable undergrowth, concerned, as he puts it, to trace the shadowy vectors that carried Leveller and Ranter ideas through to the next century.

It is an odd, exciting enterprise. Exciting, because it helps to free Blake's work from the academic culture in which critics have encapsulated it and shift it firmly into the sphere of radical religious activism. Thompson is suitably sniffy about the learned neo-Platonist Blake, and celebrates him instead as (in A L Morton's fine phrase) "England's last and greatest antinomian", part of that ultra-leftist Christian cult for which the Law had now yielded ground entirely to Love (along with the odd bout of communal sex).

If the book is a shade odd, it is because demonstrating this case means burying oneself in the bizarre doctrinal discourses of some pretty wacky grouplets, at the risk of abandoning all critical perspective. One suspects that the Thompson who here solemnly dissects Moravian imagery or the Doctrine of the Two Seeds would be a little more scathing about this swinging libertarianism were he to meet it, for example, in the guise of student radicalism or modern-day anarchism.

It is unusual and instructive to watch an agnostic socialist taking religion with such intense seriousness; but it is equally unusual to see Edward Thompson devoutly suspend his splendidly acerbic critical faculties when treating it. The distance between this, and the abrasive polemic against Methodism in *The Making of the English Working Class* is very striking. Perry Anderson has already pointed to the irony of a man stung to fury by Althusserian jargon rambling with such seeming serenity in a thicket of obscurantist supernaturalism. It is, of course, English rather than French obscurantism, and it all happened long ago; but Thompson's engagingly flamboyant style was always a little cramped by not having something to swipe at, and there are plenty of potential targets here.

It is not, strangely enough, a political book at all. Or at least it is political only to the extent that religious dissent was always inherently that. In a cursory gesture, Thompson suggests that the American Blake scholar David Erdman has taken care of the politics, and so clears a space for him to concentrate on the antinomian and apocalyptic. But one would have dearly loved to read a more direct Thompsonian account of Blake's politics, rather than one filtered through the twists and turns of Behmenists and the Beast.

Like many an academic work, this is covertly autobiographical—for William Blake speaks intimately to Thompson's libertarian humanism, mirrors his own Romantic recklessness and warm-hearted impatience, allows him to indulge an emotional excess and brio of which his more sober historical mind may not wholly have approved. And it is, in that sense, an entirely fitting testimony to the greatest of our socialist historians.

Terry Eagleton is Warton Professor of English at Oxford

Back to black

DEAD MAN UPRIGHT
Derek Raymond
Little, Brown, £15.99

Elizabeth Young

Readers familiar with Derek Raymond's acclaimed "Factory" detective novels will find that this fifth book in the series comes as no surprise. Its themes and obsessions parallel the previous novels. However, new readers may find it hard to understand what all the fuss is about. I strongly recommend that they begin with the earlier books—*The Devil's Home On Leave* or *I Was Dora Suarez*—before proceeding to *Dead Man Upright*.

The narrator of all these books is an embittered, compassionate and unnamed detective. He works out of a West End police station nicknamed "The Factory". Personally unambitious, his one concern is to see justice done in a world where both police and villains can be equally corrupt. He works for a department known as "Unexplained Deaths", which investigates the humble, often unmourned deaths of ordinary people.

The novels are unremittingly bleak and hellish. They circle like vultures over the most scarred and god-forsaken areas of London. They are raw, wrenching books, fuelled by an intense pity for human distress, and they spare neither the writer nor the reader.

Throughout the series, Raymond has shown an increasing interest in the psychology of the psychopathic murderer. *I Was Dora Suarez* featured one such lost and terrible soul: Tony Spavento, the details of whose sadistic and masochistic excesses Raymond compiled from police reports. Last year he published an autobiography, *The Hidden Files*, in which he described his theories regarding "black" or "noir" fiction and suggested that the "vile psychic weather" of his novels was "a means of destroying evil by writing about it".

Dead Man Upright contines these investigations and attempts to focus even more closely on a personality striated with evil. Our narrator is called in when a former colleague becomes suspicious of an elderly neighbour who seems to have too many wealthy, middle-aged girlfriends who keep vanishing. Behind a montage of aliases and property companies is found Ronald Jidney, who does indeed turn out to be a serial killer.

This provides Raymond with another opportunity to dissect a murderous psychopathology. Unfortunately, his immersion in this aspect of his work has become so all-encompassing that it overwhelms the book. His increasing familiarity with criminal psychology makes Jidney far more of a text-book case than his previous villains. Jidney's disrupted childhood, his arson, his bed-wetting, his sexual assaults and his hoarding of sexual trophies (pubic hair, like Christie) all serve to present him as a case rather than a character.

One of Raymond's guiding ideas is that the self-absorption of the psychopath makes him an extraordinarily boring character. Much of the book documents Jidney's conversations with his psychiatrist; it makes for accuracy rather than readable fiction.

Raymond seems to have reached a point of no return in his survey of the psychotic killer. He understands that there is nothing glamorous or mysterious about such evil. Such people are dull, bombastic and indifferent to others. Raymond pays for his knowledge by being unable to provide his character with the alluring veneer fiction requires. Such insights strangle the imagination.

The unique atmosphere of the "Factory" novels persists—the weariness, cynicism and black humour—but even the familiar characters seem less animated than usual. Additionally, the book cannot function as a detective novel in that there is no mystery; we are introduced to the murderer and the victim in the first pages. Raymond has prodigious literary gifts as a writer of classic low-life London novels. If his imagination has briefly drifted too close to the social sciences, this will almost certainly be righted in the next "Factory" novel which, he says, will take an entirely different approach. Meanwhile, for the full flavour of Raymond's searing prose, listen to him reading on the new CD *Dora Suarez* (Clawfist Records), accompanied by a soundtrack from James Johnston and Terry Edwards of Gallon Drunk.

Talking shop

JARGON: ITS USES AND ABUSES
Walter Nash
Blackwell, £16.99

Laurie Taylor

Walter Nash has reasons to be cheerful. As emeritus professor of modern English language at Nottingham University, he no longer spends his mornings cramming students into lecture rooms and his afternoons in committee meetings, listening to colleagues talk of: "operating in the tutorial situation", "maximising feedback, "managerialism", "corporate image", "range of proven teaching strengths", "packages of proposals", "involving students in the decision-making process" and "developing entrepreneurial skills".

Why, asks Nash, have academics suddenly begun to talk in this extraordinary fashion? Are they anxious to be mistaken for business people, or do they find it easier to perm such phrases than invent their own? Just as Michael Frayn once provided a set of terms (shock, horror, probe, bid) for generating instant tabloid headlines, Nash shows how such jargon may be shuffled without losing a single inch of sense. "You can . . . maximise feedback from your package of proposals, after accessing students to the decision-making process . . . or you can develop and enhance entrepreneurial skills . . . with a view to targeting pre-selected overseas markets".

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What makes this knockabout so enjoyable is the knowledge that the author has no hidden political agenda. Unlike other writers on the misuses of language, Nash is not collecting examples of jargon in order to criticise the current moral order. Jargon, he insists, has always been with us, and his concern is to show its functions and the ways in which it is generated and exported to ordinary language.

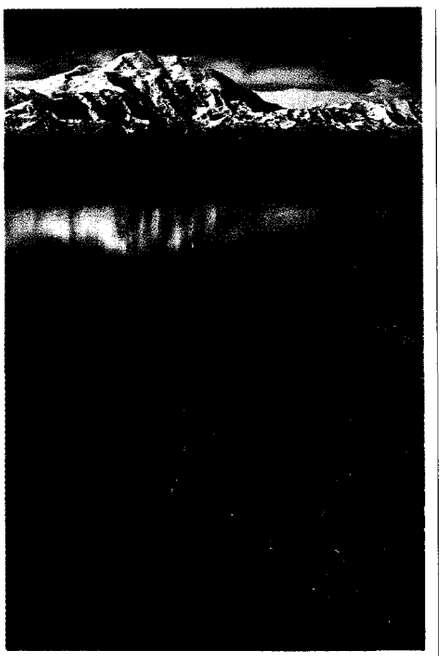
He distinguishes between three types: the jargon of profession ("shop talk"); the jargon of production ("sales talk"); and the jargon of pretension ("show talk"). He is most sympathetic to the jargon of profession. Occupations inevitably develop their own vocabulary, and over time their special talk has done much to enhance English. The jargon of production is far less innocent, in that it introduces a way of talking that seeks to control a potential customer's response.

When a hotel brochure announces that "You'll *thrill* to the rhythms of Joe Tonks and his Moonlight Samba Band", we are not only being involved in the product through a personal appeal but also invited to accept an appraisal of it. This can prove irresistible, however much we know that the jargon invitation to "relax in the elegant tranquillity of our Foxhunter Lounge" may well "conceal the identity of a morose and fusty chamber with little to offer by way of entertainment and relaxation beyond a large oil painting of an ugly horse and some superannuated and coffee-stained numbers of *Country Life*".

After this happy savagery it's a relief to find Nash being relatively kind to sociologists when he turns to the jargon of pretension. "Sociologists are commonly vilified as breeders of jargon, but it must sometimes be said in their defence that they are honest folk talking their peculiarly productive shop." His real wrath is reserved for critical theorists and paticularly for those who seek to justify obscurity by insisting, like Colin MacCabe, that "Difficulty is, as we know, an ideological notion". That "as we know" is a red rag to Nash. "'As we know'", he writes, "begs a very large question, and Professor MacCabe's assertion has a lot in common with the ... 'come on' sentences used in advertisement copy. 'As we know' lives in the same street as 'Laboratory tests have shown'."

Nash only stutters slightly in the face of "political correctness". As someone who elsewhere manages some delicate distinctions, he might have done better than characterise PC as "a club-making power of such formidable clout, particularly in academic circles, that the liberal, the eccentric and the solitary are obliged to keep what is fashionably known as a low profile".

Perhaps he was tiring by this point. His text gives out entirely a few pages later and makes way for a "glossary" which is far too close to existing dictionaries of neologisms. It also means that we partly lose the book's special appeal—the engaging sound of the emeritus professor riffling through newspapers, menus, brochures, and PR handouts in search of more juicy jargon. We learn from the jacket that Nash "likes laughing". When we can't hear him doing so, he loses our attention.



New poetry

Out of line

Peter Forbes

James Fenton used to be Auden-and-water—still more potent than most of our home-brewed verse. His first full collection in ten years, *Out of Danger* (Penguin, £7.50), shows a radical change of style. Only the fine "The Milkfish Gatherers" is in the usual bizarre-narrative mode. The new Fenton turns its back on the 20th-century obsession with the concrete particular, and aspires to the pure Blakean lyric. Many of the poems are simple songs woven around the great abstractions; the first, "Beauty, Danger and Dismay", strikes the note.

There are huge risks in this, and I don't think Fenton faces up to them. The word "dismay", for example, appears at the crux of no less than three poems. One is left with the uncomfortable feeling that Fenton wants us to take on trust the huge significance of the fact that *he* is dismayed. But why should we? A lengthy press release written by Fenton talks of "things which I admit are rather foolish but which *I couldn't bear to throw away*" [his italics]. If that's not the worst kind of invitation to the reader, I don't know what is.

Many of the poems were conceived as songs, and certainly "In Paris with You" is an acceptable Porterish lyric (Cole not Peter), complete with the jocular songwriter rhyme: "wounded/maroonded". But all the magic would have to come from the unheard tune. The book contains manifesto poems that expound Fenton's current impatience with stylistic determinism. He demands the right to be various. Granted: but what the manifestos don't make explicit is his rejection of the 20th century.

"I tremble when I think of the coming tornado of 'colour'," wrote Ansel Adams in 1944. "Ansel Adams in Colour" (Little, Brown, £35) proves that the great photographer used the technical storm to enrich his search for the sublime across America's empty spaces (this is Mount McKinley, Alaska)

Many of these poems dare the traditional flight of fancy: "Near as the rainbow to the rain,/The west wind to the windowpane,/As fire to hearth, as dawn to dew". Coming from such a cerebral poet, this apparent innocence is both startling and suspect. Isn't such alliterative rhetoric nullified by its palpable design on us, its attempt to mine the vein of received poeticisms? Early Fenton poems, such as the famous "In a Notebook", use such traditional effects in a new way. He's walking a tightrope, but most of this book finds him thrashing around in the safety net.

Is there anything here to like unreservedly? (I admire Fenton's early work very much indeed.) "The Mistake", one of the dismayed poems, will receive an echo in every breast; "The Milkfish Gatherers" is perfect poetic travel writing—about fishing rituals in the Philippines, where "They named the sea's inhabitants with style—The slapped vagina fish, the horse's dick". "Jerusalem", written to the tune of Milton's "Hymn on Christ's Nativity", captures the terror and weight of symbolism impacted into one small city. But that's about it.

Carol Rumens has also changed direction in the new part of *Thinking of Skins: New and Selected Poems* (Bloodaxe, £8.95). For many years, eastern Europe and Russia were her obsession, but she is now writer-in-residence in Belfast. This has brought her to some extent back to her roots, if one can use the term for a writer so drawn to loss and exile.

But poetic roots Rumens certainly has. Philip Larkin is one of them, and Larkin of course once lived and worked in Belfast. "The Lisburn Road List" is explicitly a set of variations on Larkin's "why-be-here" theme. For whatever reason, her lines have expanded in Belfast. Her last book, *From Berlin to Heaven*, employed almost exclusively short lines; but I believe her gift is for the full pentameter length, as in "Walking Out".

Perhaps the strongest poem here is "Stealing the Genre", in which "she" may be a female lover or the Muse, and the genre stolen is the Gravesian tradition in which the Muse and the latest woman are fruitfully confused by male poets to produce the familiar magic of lyric poetry.

"Et Incarnatus Est" is a fine example of the sort of poem she has always written superlatively well; formal, drawn to loneliness and exquisite cameos of sight and sense: "Windows are often loneliest when lighted/Their silvery plenitude a kind of treason".

There are hints of homage to Belfast's greatest poet, Louis MacNeice, and one of the delights of the book is the realisation that Belfast—that grim and agonised city—still contains the seeds of regeneration. The selection from her early books is tighter than in her previous *Selected Poems* (1987), and the

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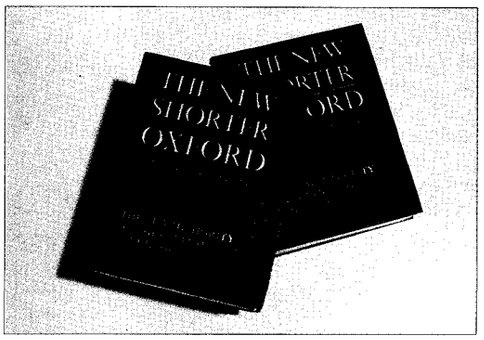

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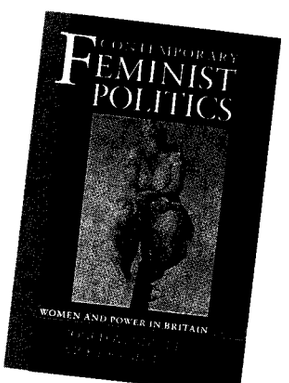

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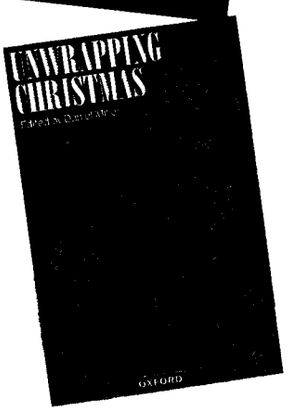

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book ought to bring her renewed recognition as one of the best poets of our time.

In his third book, *Corona, Corona* (Faber & Faber, £5.99), **Michael Hofmann**'s poetry remains a curious combination of nervily precise and tightly packed scathing description, and gawkily adolescent moods. The typical Hofmann poem is a cultural mélange in which objects and moods are sylleptically mingled: "an electrical grille and a siege mentality", "wearing a pleasant frown and predistressed denims".

In the Mexican poems that end the book the technique seems overloaded, but most of the volume delivers impressive, jaundiced slabs of our time. Everything in Hofmann is toxic: "Pastorale" has "the farmer's stockpiled hayroles and his flocks,/ancillary, bacillary blocks of anthrax".

Hofmann's endings are notorious for their nervous trailing off. The perfect example here is "Freebird", which ends with overheard intercourse (a recurrent theme): "Her little screams petered out, *inachevée*". Perhaps the word is *meant* to infuriate with its prissiness, its sense of frittering inconsequentiality. It is both *le mot juste* and a pain in the neck.

If Hofmann is sometimes too overwrought, **Jackie Kay** is direct to a fault. Her diction in *Other Lovers* (Bloodaxe, £5.95) is usually that of everyday language with no frills. She relies on rhythm and timing to create an undoubted charge. A batch of poems for Bessie Smith from her play *Every Bit of It* uses the incantatory rhythms of the blues to fine effect: "There are some stones that open in the night like flowers/Down in the red graveyard where Bessie haunts her lovers".

Many of the poems are love poems. The title sequence charts the cultural lurches in breaking and making relationships ("You will never listen to Nina Simone, again"). Jackie Kay is a popular poet, still gaining in power. Black by birth, and Scottish by upbringing, she has plenty of that species of bravado Les Murray calls *sprawl*, but also the kind of fierce tenderness you need to animate the timeless love lyric. James Fenton, take note.

Peter Forbes edits "Poetry Review"

Oral pith

THE PENGUIN BOOK OF INTERVIEWS
Christopher Silvester (editor)
Viking, £18.99

Michael Horovitz

This 650-page doorstop brings together the editor's pick of interviews from 1859 to 1992. In a typeface even smaller than that of *Private Eye* (whose gossip columnist Silvester is) it reprints conversations with about 80 influential politicians, philosophers, scientists, writers, actors and showbizzy-bodies, a sprinkling of architects, musicians and singers, plus Picasso, Alfred Hitchcock and Lester Piggott. It illustrates the lavishly entertaining variety of form and content with which the genre has been deployed and adds up to a condensed history of the age.

As I chomped my way through Marx, Twain, Edison, Lillie Langtry, Bismarck, Zola, Ibsen, Rhodes, Pankhurst, Marconi, Clemenceau, Freud, Shaw, Gandhi, Dylan Thomas, Beckett, Fitzgerald, Hemingway, Kennedy, Monroe, Macmillan, Waugh, Mao, Nabokov, Lennon, Arthur Miller, Burroughs, Sammy Davis, Gertrude Stein *et al*, I found myself wondering whether Jesus or Plato would have given good tape—then thought, well, in effect they did. As did Buddha, Goethe, Dr Johnson and so many others from way back whose reflections got recorded and recycled, one way or another.

Silvester has selected from newspaper and magazine dialogues only. His introduction emphasises how, early on, a growing number of women, glad of unchaperoned encounters with public men, swiftly became adept at interviews and at using them as an *entrée* to journalism and other realms of power. The very word suggests a view shared between two or more, which might be closer to a female's nature than a male's—even if, in recent years, mugging seems the order of the day as often as arselick.

Silvester claims "we all crave the illusion of intimacy with celebrities that the interview can provide", begging the question of why and how this or that person has become celebrated, and by whom. I didn't myself relish the vicarious close-ups of Francis Bacon afforded by a *South Bank Show* that took "us" through his shamelessly liquid dinner with Melvyn Bragg. Every time Bacon repeated "I'm optimishtic—about *nothing*!" another layer of the awe with which I had regarded his paintings fell off. Wilde maintained that "The more the public is interested in artists, the less it is interested in art".

But, as is shown by the self-interview in which he said this, considerable artistry can underpin interviews. And it can be instructive as well as cringe-making to witness egotistical big-shots caught offguard, or obscure specialists brought to new(ish) insights (or more universally comprehensible ones) by dint of spontaneous interplay with listeners from other planets. On the other hand, the superficially human-like-the-rest-of-us impression to be derived from drinking in more or less civilised (ie, rigidly controlled) chitchat with Hitler, Mussolini, Al Capone, Stalin and Khrushchev implicates casual readers in a monstrous confidence trick.

Some of the richest rewards in these pages come when the vested interests or assumed etiquettes of the game are exploded, as by the passionate candour of Montgomery Clift. He swore, mockingly mimicked his chat-cop, wept, flung himself to the floor in despair, and pretended not to hear the most banal of the questions. "You have to pay a high price to be a public figure, and I find it offensive."

Subtle interviewers make up for the absence of cameras and voice-recording with graphic behind-the-scene evocations. Terry Coleman depicts an ever more stridently bullying Thatcher advancing along the sofa until, toward her final perfumed-fart peroration, she appears literally about to sit on him. Robert Robinson meets Brendan Behan, who had just signed a West End contract: "He broke into song as we entered the pub . . . shook hands all round, placed himself in a strategic position behind a battery of bitters and clinked glasses. 'I shake hands with no member of the upper class except the Guinness family. They've done a lot for me.' 'Ah,' said I, 'but look what you've done for Guinness.'"

Oral pith of this ilk bubbles and babbles throughout the book. Mae West strikes me as the most accomplished and engaging epigrammarian: "I always held Hollywood at arm's length, like a would-be lover you can't exactly trust"; "Men worry about what they haven't got, and women *know* what they haven't got"; "Too much of a good thing is wonderful".

Unlike some of his chosen interviewers and some of their subjects, Silvester's fieldwork has earned the oodles of boodle that will no doubt accrue from this unprecedented gathering of extended quotations. Perhaps his next project should be an even more revealing anthology of *interpretations* of the sayings of the allegedly great and good. Top of my list is the sassy schoolkid who completed in less than one minute the exercise set by her English teacher, back from a rapturous audience with Somerset Maugham, to compose a short story blending the essential ingredients divulged by the Master: religion, the upper classes, sex and mystery. "'My God', said the Duchess. 'I'm pregnant. . . . *Whodunnit?*'"

Fantasy fiction

Return of the repressed

Jo-Ann Goodwin

Rare and noble indeed is the individual who approaches fantasy fiction bereft of preconceptions. The genre has the ability to excite fear and loathing alongside an enthusiasm that borders on the obsessive. However, despite huge and growing sales, fantasy has failed to make its mark as serious literary endeavour. It could be said that fantasy is about as fashionable as a pair of crushed-velvet, lime-green loons. Except, of course, that lime-green loons are making a well-deserved comeback; I even have a pair myself. In similar style (impractical, mock-medieval and totally over the top), fantasy is beginning to assert its claim for a place in the sun.

Michael Swanwick's book *The Iron Dragon's Daughter* (Millennium, £14.99) appears at first glance to be a fairly typical mixture of fantasy and techno-cyberpunk. The publishers claim that the book is "very special", and that its style is "part Brothers

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Grimm, part Charles Dickens". It was only the fact that this missive was signed by the highly respected Deborah Beale that prevented me from putting the book down. Two days and 350 pages later, I would have gladly added my own signature to those apparently preposterous claims.

The novel follows the career of Jane, whom we first meet as one of the army of enslaved children working in a dragon factory. This is Dickensian grotesquerie and exploitation, with sexual cruelty and dystopian invention thrown in for good measure. Swanwick plays with the accepted tropes of classical fantasy—dragons, elves, dwarves, changelings—in brilliantly inventive fashion. Placed against a post-holocaust background of razor-sharp high-tech amorality, accepted fantasy vocabulary gains new resonance. *The Iron Dragon's Daughter* is simply wonderful: intelligent, heartbreaking and very funny.

Robert Jordan, by now almost three-quarters of the way through his epic *Wheel of Time* series, is another American who—like Tad Williams with his *Memory, Thorn and Sorrow* trilogy—is writing high fantasy that demands to be taken seriously. The fifth book in Jordan's series, *The Fires of Heaven* (Orbit, £15.99), takes the author's current tally to around 5,000 pages.

Writing on this sort of scale is a feat of logistics in its own right. Six central characters (three men, three women), plus a dozen more figures of almost equal importance, move across disparate lands and cultures surrounded by a cast of hundreds of minor characters. Jordan manages to imbue even the most fleeting of bit-part players with individuality, while the central characters are drawn with impressive complexity. He has been rightly praised for creating an entirely convincing and compelling alternative world, complete with social systems, cultural difference and competing motivations.

The books' treatment of sexual politics, the passage from adolescence to maturity, and the personal relationships gives the series depth and rigour. *The Fires of Heaven*, concentrating on leadership and personal responsibility, continues the high standard of Jordan's earlier work, all of which is achieved with a fine narrative swing and sense of timing that makes it a pleasure to read.

Lasher (Chatto & Windus, 15.99) is the new novel by **Anne Rice**, author of the highly successful *Vampire Chronicles*. Witches rather than vampires are the focus of this book, although the backdrop of dark secrets and illicit sexuality remains. Born and based in New Orleans, Rice's prose style is very Edith Wharton/Henry James (although, to be fair, I can't remember any incidence of graveyard copulation involving a 13-year-old girl in *Portrait of a Lady*).

Grand families in grand American houses indulge in long sticky conversations in which the word "enigmatic" takes on an entirely new meaning. Anne Rice is adept at creating an atmosphere of doomy tension. What she lacks is narrative pace. The intricate plot is ill served by writing that has rather too much polish and rather too little verve.

Anthologies are awkward beasts at best, but *New Myth and Magic* (Women's Press, £7.99) shows that with judicious and skilful editing such enterprises can rise above the usual unseemly rag-bag. Although the book is a bit too fond of pointing out what magnificent, mysterious and entirely virtuous creatures women are (as opposed to their snivelling, venal and occasionally sinister male counterparts) there are some outstanding contributions and the overall standard is surprisingly high. Margaret Elphinstone's "Conditions of Employment" is cleverly plotted and beautifully developed. "Mother Was an Alien" by Katherine V Forrest delivers the feminist message with a pleasing tongue-in-cheek perkiness. The editor, Helen Windrath, is to be congratulated on an intelligent, witty and entertaining piece of work.

Jo-Ann Goodwin is co-author, with Tony Banks, of "Out of Order" (Century)

Play it again

PEMBERLEY
Emma Tennant
Hodder & Stoughton, £9.99
MRS DE WINTER
Susan Hill
Sinclair-Stevenson, £11.99

Kathryn Hughes

Pemberley and *Mrs de Winter* comprise codas to two of English literature's most loved and enduring texts. Thus *Pemberley* tells the story of what-happened-next to Elizabeth Bennett, Mr Darcy and the rest of the cast of Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*. Mrs de Winter, meanwhile, fast-forwards to a point ten years beyond the end of Daphne de Maurier's *Rebecca* to discover the fate of Mrs Danvers, Maxim de Winter and, of course, the nameless narrator.

Both texts, significantly, concern the non-appearance of heirs. Elizabeth Bennett has been married a full year, and while her sisters Jane and Lydia have produced the required sons, Eliza herself remains embarrassingly unencumbered. Likewise, the second Mrs de Winter, at 34, has begun to give up hope of materialising the tribe of robust, playful boys who already live inside her head.

In their concentration on the non-appearance of the next generation, both texts draw attention to the lack of closure in the original novels. While *Pride and Prejudice* appeared to offer the classic marriage plot of high-realist fiction, it also offered a teasing commentary upon it, refusing to tie up the ends as neatly as Mrs Bennett—and the reader—desired. In *Pemberley*, Emma Tennant reminds us that the finicky courtship rituals, the dancing and the walks in the park have a deadly serious end: the safe handing over of property from one generation to the next through a male heir. Only with Elizabeth

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pregnant can the story be said to be over.

In the same way, Susan Hill returns to de Maurier's *Rebecca* and worries away at the little tags and tears in the concluding chapter. Far from wrapping things up nicely, de Maurier's resolution is morally—and novelistically—untenable. Hill's task is to work out the moral plot of *Rebecca* to its final conclusion. Not until Maxim de Winter has paid for the murder of his first wife with his own life can the ghost of Rebecca be laid to rest.

Both Tennant's and Hill's novels are tacked seamlessly on to their predecessors. The reproduction of tone and character is faultless. True, Tennant allows herself to peer into Elizabeth and Darcy's bedroom in a manner which would have been impossible for Jane Austen, but she does it with such grace that her gentle voyeurism seems to extend rather than intrude upon our understanding of the original.

Hill's achievement, by contrast, is more laboured. While Tennant can simply bring all her characters to Pemberley (Darcy's country seat) for an extended Christmas holiday, Hill has to work hard to get Mrs Danvers from Cornwall to Gloucestershire and to produce a chance meeting in Venice between the de Winters and a still grizzling Mrs Van Hopper. Resorting to contrivance and coincidence as de Maurier never had to, Hill's narrative fails to find the urgent drive of its predecessor.

Logical and accomplished though *Pemberley* and *Mrs de Winter* may both be, the question remains as to why two such prominent talents as Hill and Tennant should be engaged on what, when it comes down to it, is nothing more than literary ventriloquism. For despite all the fancy arguments about intertextuality and knowing pastiche, the fact is that writing sequels to fabulous best-sellers represents a commercial and artistic safe bet.

Just as Hollywood now ransacks 1960s television series to turn tested formulas into big box office, so novelists seem to look to yesterday's smash hits to guarantee at least a modest success. In *Pemberley*, for instance, Tennant has no need to worry about those slow and difficult opening chapters where characters have to be introduced and relationships explained. She can plunge straight into the thick of the action, sure that she is neither boring nor confusing her readers.

In this world of endless literary recycling there is no reason why the characters from *Pride and Prejudice* and *Rebecca* could not be given their own fanzine and sent on a series of endless adventures. The corollary of low-risk writing is, after all, low-risk reading. Where once upon a time the postmodernist reader was an alert creature, ever on the look out for subtle nods at other texts, these days he or she is more likely to be a lazy sentimentalist, happy to reread old favourites.

Yet there is always the possibility that out of such deadness might come renewal. In this case, the ceremonial sealing-off of two such open texts as *Pride and Prejudice* and *Rebecca* could just represent the point at which the contemporary novel's obsession with the burden of its own past is laid to rest, leaving the way for something new to happen.

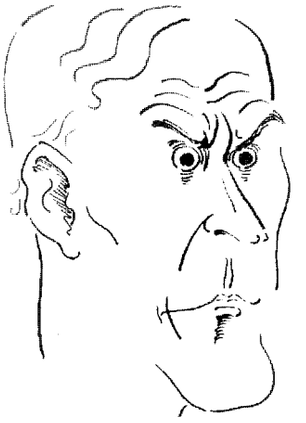
Cartoon collections

Sketch books

Jonathan Sale

In the beginning, "If" was a bit iffy. Every day the *Guardian* strip introduced its characters—the stockbrokers making a killing out of dead dogs, for example—and tried to see them off with a punchline four frames later. "If" was promising as a conditional clause but the main verb never quite put in an appearance. The Falklands war, as with Thatcher, was the making of **Steve Bell**. Without leaving home, he became a terrific war artist. In his cartoons, the troops springing out of landing-craft were armed with press badges and typewriters, ready to annihilate the Argies with steely prose and bullet-like crossheads.

He went over the top and has never retreated to his trench. His yarns run on from day to day for as long as it takes. *If . . . Bottoms Out* (Mandarin, £5.99) is his latest collection of reports from the front. Or, in Kenneth Clarke's case, the back. "Aside from your ability to blow smoke rings through your arse," the hacks ask the posteriorly-endowed Chancellor, "what else will you be bringing with you to the Treasury?" Some of his characters are more grotesquely lifelike than their originals. His John Major, in free-fall or in love with a sack of sand, possesses more flesh and blood than the real PM. His Socks, the White House cat, is everything the real president would like to be: a bomber of Serbs and the sire of 500 bastard kittens.



Marc Boxer's Tony Benn; in Mark Amory's memorial volume of the much-missed caricaturist's work, "The Collected and Recollected Marc" (Fourth Estate, £25)

Like Steve Bell, **Posy Simmonds** began cautiously, with a pastiche of schoolgirl comics. Then she too took off and *Mustn't Grumble* (Jonathan Cape, £9.99) includes: a re-working of *The Cherry Orchard* around an English weekend cottage; a history of footwear, demonstrating the rise and fall of feminism; an illustrated parody of *Jerusalem*; and family sagas spanning decades. Sometimes her strip is mainly visual; sometimes practically a hand-lettered article. Always it is full of wry

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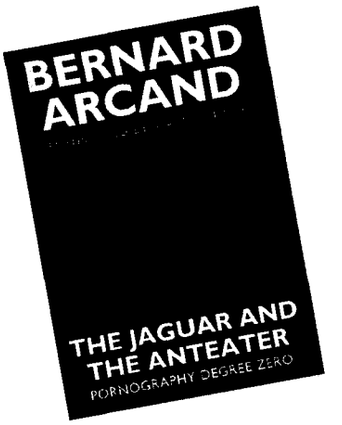

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jokes. The Chattering Classes chatter, and Posy listens.

Naturally enough, **Charles Peattie** and **Russell Taylor** did make the leap from the *Independent* to the *Daily Telegraph*. Being headhunted is exactly what their yuppie creation, Alex, is all about. He put the "a" in amoral; he knows no shame save that of driving last year's (company) car. He suffers from fear of flying economy class. If he isn't selling his grandmother, it is only because he can't raise the asking price. If Machiavelli were alive and working in the city, Alex would be his role-model.

The Alex strip runs across the bottom of every page in *Office Warfare* (Headline, £14.99). Inevitably, it dominates the words above it like the a mobile-phone user dominating a first-class carriage. Occasionally **Michael Becket**, in his guide to executive survival, lets rip (never use Muzak except "to drown the gibberings of the insane"). But on the whole he is oddly restrained, considering that as a City editor he must know where a few financial bodies are buried.

In the last days of *Punch*, we started a strip inspired by the dire men in suits whose achievement it was to close down the magazine. None of them was offended by "The Suits", Michael Heath's weekly portrayal of naff yes-men. Each thought it applied not to him but to the berk in the next room. In the same way, dead ringers for the appalling Alex doubtless believe that he is based on the (double) dealer at the next screen. The other achievement of Peattie and Taylor is to avoid becoming predictable. Just when you think you can see the punchline coming, they pull the rug from the final frame.

Unlike poor old **Giles**. Giles Country is located in some prewar, knees-up-Mother Brown timewarp. His idea of topicality was to find a story so obscure he had to make it the headline of the paper that Dad was reading, then take the idea one step *backwards*, finally adding a lumbering beast of a caption. His most creative work was the annual struggle to slide in a reference to the dreaded boat show sponsored by his newspaper.

You have to admit, though, that he was big. He took up a large slab of the *Express*. It was an achievement to fill all that space and there was a kind of life about the cast of thousands that he shoved in the periphery of his cartoons. His cheekie-chappie work did not comment on contemporary life but, like advertisements, occasionally reflected it.

Two collections by **Peter Tory** (*The Giles Family*, £17.99 and *Giles: a life in cartoons*, £8.99, both Headline) reveal that he kept it up, or down, for half a century without any loss of quality. That is, he was as irritating in the 1990s as in the 1940s. But people liked him. *Her Majesty* likes him. Apparently, the Palace owns the original artwork of a wet cartoon showing the uncancelled milk bottles piling up in the Mall while the conscientious Queen travels the world. That is not a likely resting place for Steve Bell's handiwork. Any more than referring to Prince Philip as a "bald reactionary bigot and bonehead" is the way to earn a "By Royal Appointment" sticker.

Track events

THE SEARCH
Geoff Dyer
Hamish Hamilton, £14.99

Peter Jukes

Three factors weigh very heavily in Geoff Dyer's favour. His first book, a criticial biography of John Berger, showed him to be one of the few younger writers taking on Berger's tradition of experiment. His second, *The Colour of Memory*, was effectively a critical biography of a generation. Of all the hyped novels about 1980s London it remains one of the most genuine. And his third, *But Beautiful*: eight improvisations on jazz, a genre-defying book. With Nick Hornby's *Fever Pitch*, it shows a way out of the dead ends of conventional fiction.

The only problem with such a persistently inventive list is how to add to it, and *The Search* strikes out in yet another new direction: the philosophical detective novel. Our hero is a "tracker", a professional tracer of missing persons commissioned by a beautiful woman to locate her absconded husband.

Unfortunately, no photo of the man exists and the tracker has to piece together a picture of his subject while being pursued in turn by a murderous rival gumshoe. Finally, all the fragments of the missing man come together in the city of Nemesis on a day an experimental film-maker has chosen to collect every image taken of the city.

Though hardly the first writer to do it, Dyer unpicks the fascination of detective fiction: the way we try to construct truth, motive, character from fading forensic traces. With a hero called Walker, a missing husband called Malory, a rival called Carver, even the names read like clues. The novel sets out to be the Big Sleep, reimagined as an Arthurian quest for photographic truth and delivered in the spare voice of American dirty realism.

That's how it sets out. But as soon as Walker disappears into cities of suspended time, of nostalgia, of *déjà vu*, it becomes clear whose footsteps we're really following. The true guiding spirit is Italo Calvino, especially the author of the brilliant *Invisible Cities*.

If any British writer can try on the mantle of Calvino, Dyer can. He has a poet's gift with metaphor as well as an ability to grasp ideas, hold them up to the light, pass them on.

But where Calvino studied folktales for years and was intensely solicitous of the forms he recycled, Dyer's choice has not been quite so happy. Perhaps his prose is just too open for the blind compulsions of *film noir*, but at times (especially in spoken dialogue and some rushed action sequences), Dyer seems simply uncomfortable with the form. The central dynamics—the hero's unfulfilled quest for Malory, his infatuation with Malory's wife—are structural clichés Dyer would never allow himself on the scale of a sentence or a paragraph.

A wonderful procession of observations,

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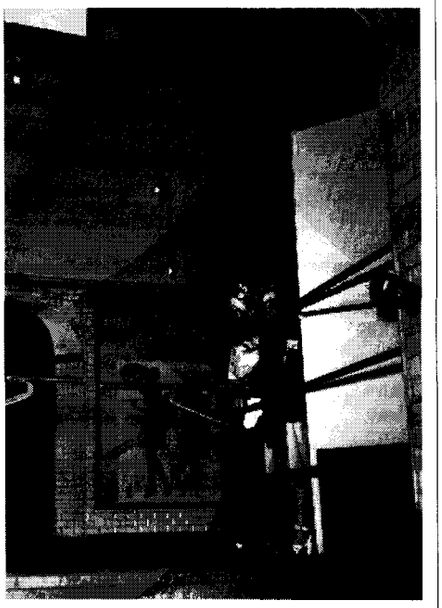
hitched to a two-stroke narrative engine: this is the danger for nearly half the book. But as soon as Dyer drops the thriller, pace returns and he is free to return to his real concerns—strangers and strange encounters in cities, the effects of travel, the impossibility of knowing others except through their images.

At times, *The Search* achieves for our current image-saturated indifference what Camus could do with an earlier era of boredom: isolate the condition without reproducing the effect. And as if to prove me wrong about his abilities with *noir*, Dyer pulls off some impressive filmic sequences. His hero escapes from his rival with scaffolding poles, is torn between a departing train and a developing photo, comes within yards of his quarry in a surging crowd.

All of which intimately compounds one's fears about the conventional novel. Perhaps we are going through an era when only non-fiction can accommodate the most restless talents, and when strong voices such as Dyer's need to speak in the first person rather than the third. Certainly, it's both the greatest strength and salient weakness of *The Search* that none of its fictional characters is as vocal, powerful or interesting as their author.



The Lithuanian-born photographer Izis created a postwar Paris thronged with soppy but endearing clichés: lovers, dogs, cats, kids, tramps. "Izis: captive dreams" (Thames & Hudson, £30) will seduce romantic softies

Liberal positions

THE BLOOMSBURY GUIDE TO EROTIC LITERATURE
Jane Mills (editor)
Bloomsbury, £19.99

Harriett Gilbert

Juicy wetness; hard, throbbing members; orgasm after orgasm . . . Athough its editor claims that there are "relatively few examples of obvious pornography in this anthology," I can only reply that reading the whole, especially in the concentrated way in which a reviewer reads, is an experience hard to distinguish from reading a pornographic novel.

By this I mean that right from the opening ancient Sumerian love poems—"He laid his hands on my holy vulva,/He smoothed my black boat with cream"—to the closing telephone sex of Nicholson Baker's novel *Vox*, the guide submerges you in a world in which all that exists is the body and its longings. It is not a sensible book to read on the bus, or anywhere else where some degree of social alertness is called for.

In short, with a few reservations, I enjoyed it. But those who disapprove of pornography anywhere, let alone on public transport, should not even bother to turn to page one. Because although Jane Mills has written an informed and intelligent introduction to each of the book's five sections—"Ancient World", "From the Fall of Rome to the Renaissance", "17th and 18th Centuries", "19th Century", "20th Century"—her perspective is resolutely liberal: a greater anathema to the moral right and radical, anti-porn feminists than de Sade and Pat Califia rolled into one. Mills even admits to ignoring her publisher's warning against child sexual abuse and rape on the grounds that this would have meant omitting Shakespeare's "Venus and Adonis" and a deeply erotic, troubling excerpt from Nadine Gordimer's *The Conservationist*.

Of the hundreds of examples of erotica Mills has selected—some of them poems, some the "sexy bits" from prose works—there will of course be many that leave a particular reader cold. As she says of her friends' suggestions: "I would spend days . . . tracking down their recommendations only to stare at their hot tip in amazement."

Mills' own taste can be equally bizarre. I was less than aroused by Horace's ode "To A Randy Old Woman" ("Spindle shanks, arsehole/Drooling like the incontinent cow you are") or by the bossy extract from the *Kama Sutra* that lists not only the various ways in which lovers must strike one another but the sounds they must make ("like those of the dove, the cuckoo, the green pigeon") when variously struck.

But maybe I'm doing Mills a disservice by assuming that every inclusion reflects her taste. Unlike Fiona Pitt-Kethley's recent *The Literary Companion to Sex*, whose contents give a potent idea of that poet's attitude, one of the strengths of the Bloomsbury guide is its generous eclecticism. It isn't so much that homoerotic desire co-exists with heterosexual, or that there has been an effort to avoid Eurocentrism; it is more that the quasi-religious yearning of, for example, those Sumerian poems can slip without jolt or apology into François Villon's rumbustious farting, de Sade's ingenious nastiness, Yu

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Chi'ing-Tseng's languid sensuousness or Pauline Reage's stately, sado-machochism: a constant shifting of form and mood to match the complexity of sexual desire.

That pleasure aside, it has to be said that there isn't a great deal of point to this book. Mills has a number of sensible things to say—about, for example, the snobbery that separates arty "erotica" from vulgar, mass-produced "porn"—and she carefully draws our attention to such matters as the 19th century's obsession with women's virginity, or the 20th-century emergence of lesbians writing about their own lesbianism.

None of the insights, however, is new, nor does she use them to construct a strong, central argument about erotica. But does this matter? On the contrary. At a time when anyone and everyone is thumping the table to tell us that sex means this, or should be experienced thus, Mills' non-judgmental approach is refreshing.

Harriett Gilbert is the editor of "The Sexual Imagination: a feminist companion" (Cape)

Pink trails

THE BOOK OF SODOM
Paul Hallam (editor)
Verso, £18.95
A QUEER READER
Patrick Higgins (editor)
Fourth Estate, £14.99

Roz Kaveney

I used to meet my drag hustler friends in the Pollo on Old Compton Street. It was convenient for the Golden Girl, where most of them worked. Only occasionally would DC Del Skipper lift them for importuning or deception as they went for a quick bowl of pasta. I was on his shit list for going bail, so it was a handy sidle into Soho from Charing Cross Road, as was Maison Bertaux or Capuccetto.

The new gay-male-positive Soho, made viable by the value of the pink pound in a recession, leaves me cold and in the cold. The boys' bars may welcome the oddly glamly thin boy-dyke for atmosphere, but middle-age, fat and transexual don't cut it. I still go to Pollo or Presto for pasta, to Bertaux or Capuccetto for coffee.

The relevance of this to the current rise of gay publishing will be obvious. It is pleasing that there are so many new anthologies of lesbian and gay relevance, worrying that they exclude whole categories of queer experience. When the recession is over and the pink pound less valuable, those of us silenced in the boom won't lose much . . .

Patrick Higgins calls his anthology of quotations queer: modishly rather than sincerely. He praises the drag queens who fought the police at the Stonewall bar in order to sneer at Ian McKellen for naming a bourgeois lobby group Stonewall but, with the exception of the odd 18th-century Molly, drag queens are otherwise absent from his chaste pages, as are the baby butches who hurled bottles alongside them.

Higgins is not big on solidarity. In fluent but piss-elegant introductions to his chronological and geographical chapters, he sneers at most gay scholarship and all gay organisers. He is down on the cult of gay martyrs.

Higgins takes an essentialist position when he wants to include classical poems about buggery, and an anti-essentialist, social contructionist one when he wants to deny the idea of gay community. I was one of 50 mourners at a funeral the other day. If there is not a lesbian and gay community, I don't know who all those other black-leather clad wraiths stealing round the memorial gardens were.

Higgins excludes too much for his book to be satisfactory; it is too much aimed at the sort of people he would want at dinner parties. It is worth browsing in, because Higgins is the sort of person who does a paid job well according to his lights. There are positive obsessive traits that go with piss-elegance.

Higgins is good on homophobia, from the fathers of the church to John Junor; one worries about the health of elderly gents who get so upset about other people's genitals. It's a religious thing, I suppose—I wouldn't understand. The trouble with ecumenicism is that, the more Christians, Jews and Muslims start to love one another, the more time they will have for hating the rest of us.

Paul Hallam's anthology is more overtly personal than the Higgins. His excellent introductory section—a musing on the myth of Sodom, his youth and walking the rounds of his bit of male gay London—has conversational ease and a balancing prickliness.

Where Higgins offers a guide to homophobic idiocy, Hallam shows how the myth of Sodom has been used against gay men and, to a lesser extent, lesbians. We get extended ecclesiastical rants and accounts of stonings. His choices show how glorying in the Sodomite tag has been a strategy for unapologetic identity down the ages. One of the few contemporary pieces is Sue Golding's essay on buying new address books after funerals, and on the necessity of not looking back.

Where Higgins' slick little number, with its Pierre et Gilles cover, is resolutely square, Hallam unflashily opts for queer, ludic postmodernism. He describes his construction of his own identity from texts in a narrative that frames them, while Golding refuses mourning as a way of mourning more passionately.

Yet Hallam's book has old-fashioned virtues that will keep it read. His poignant account of adolescence and Oxford makes one long for later material. It makes me want to read about how I met him around Oxford Gay Liberation Front, a few months later.

Higgins' book undercuts itself by denying, through exclusion, that shared experience which informs the act of reading it. Hallam is most interested in his own life and experience, but not at the expense of excluding others. His control of the games he is playing reminds us, and himself, that we are all in this thing together.

PRINTOUT

Under tens

Boyd Tonkin

It hardly helps the book trade's campaign against VAT that, each November, the shops fill up with mindless trash. Slap a 100 per cent tax on the drivel that masquerades as stocking-fillers, and this column won't complain. Come Boxing Day, who'll give a stale date for those naff sketches from old TV shows by some smug ex-Footlights duo? "History Today"; waste paper tomorrow.

But proper books to give abound. Fix an upper limit of £10, and almost all paperback reprints (plus the superb Everyman's Library hardbacks) fall inside it. Yet the same sum, or less, will also buy a huge range of original work published in recent weeks.

That hard-to-please feminist friend, for instance, would enjoy Michèle Roberts' bewitching short stories in "During Mother's Absence" (Virago, £9.99). Mothers-to-be (or not to be) will appreciate "Pandora's Clock: understanding our fertility" by Maureen Freely and Celia Pyper (Heinemann, £8.99), while teenager-keepers could raise a smile for Gina Davidson's Guardian columns, "Treasure" (Virago, £4.99). Kathy Lette's right-on romp, "Foetal Attraction" (Picador, £9.99), puts the stiletto into media males and Pom snobs while cheering on maternity.

Parents and others can boost their street cred with Gina Arnold's fine odyssey of rock from punk to grunge, "Route 666: the road to Nirvana" (Picador, £9.99). Fans of Angela Carter will relish the latest Gothic romance from her French near-equivalent, Sylvie Germain ("Days of Anger"; Dedalus, £8.99). As a bedside read, "Sixty Women Poets" edited by Linda France (Bloodaxe, £8.95) will easily last out the year.

Then what about that prickly globe-trotting radical? He shouldn't sneer at "Kafka for Beginners" (Icon Books, £7.99): freaky pix by Robert Crumb and text by David Zane Mairowitz. "Nobody Nothing Never" by the great Argentine novelist Juan José Saer (Serpent's Tail, £9.99) will put him one-up on the magic realists. In politics, "Low Intensity Democracy" (edited by Barry Gills et al; Pluto Press, £9.95) lets Chomsky and friends unmask the new world order.

True cosmopolitans will like the addictive BBC anthology, "The Best of Our Own Correspondent 4") (edited by Geoff Spink; I B Tauris, a shade over our limit at £10.95). This year's most provocative paperback original must be John Carroll's blast at liberal art and thought, "Humanism: the wreck of western culture" (Fontana, £6.99; more on this next week). For comic relief, try Denis Leary's scabrous wit ("No Cure for Cancer"; Picador, £4.99). And Gilles Néret's learned yet lavish "Twentieth-Century Erotic Art" (Benedikt Taschen, £9.99) may even prove to be a seminal influence on future generations. Which is where we came in . . .

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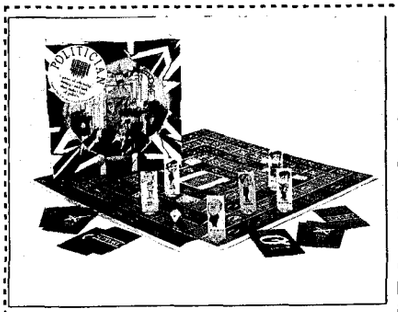

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COURSES/CONFERENCES

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CENTRAL HALL,
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- **Beating Racism North & South**
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* Afif Safieh, UK Representative, PLO
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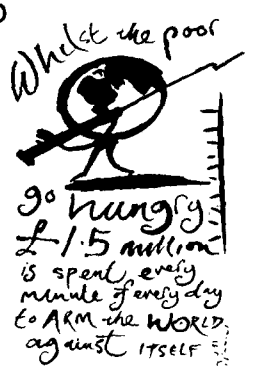
* Doreen Cameron, Vice President, NATFE



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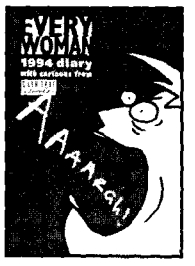

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John Edmonds, General Secretary, GMB;
Bryan Gould MP;
Diana Jeuda, Political Officer USDAW;
Professor Peter Townsend, University of Bristol;
Margaret Prosser, National Organiser TGWU;
Dawn Primarolo MP;
Dr Brian Burkitt, University of Bradford;
Ken Livingstone MP;
Dr Paul Dunne, University of Leeds;
Diane Abbott MP;
Jean Corston MP;
Larry Elliott, Guardian Economics Correspondent;
Jean Geldart, TUC General Councillor UNISON;
Tony Chater, Editor, Morning Star;
Ann Pettifor, Labour Women's Action Committee

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HEARTSEARCH MAY BRING HEARTACHE, but nothing ventured nothing gained. Woman, 63, still in gear, not academic, but degree of individuality and humour. *Friendly, not social,* wishes to correspond with unattached non-confrontational man, hopefully meet later should interests click. Please write to Box (141) 718.

ATTRACTIVE, CREATIVE MAN (65), stimulated by the Arts generally, seeks sensual woman, any age to 60s, slim or medium, any circumstances, for life-enhancing relationship. London/London accessible. Write to Box (136) 687.

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OXFORD BASED MAN (28), balding, bearded, bespectacled, big-eared, seeks smart, cuddly n/s feminist (25ish-30-ish) for pizza, friendship. Likes books, music, guitars, France. Brains essential. Looks a bonus. Please write to Box (140) 715.

EDUCATED, DECENT, HUMOROUS MAN, having reached middle age without family, intends to remedy this. In good condition, financially secure (not rich), affectionate, unattached, currently London, but relocatable. Any ladies (maybe mothers already) interested? Please write to Box (140) 716.

TOO GENTLE, TOO SHY, unpretentious, mature, educated bachelor, country-loving/living, servile. Good job, wide interests, seeks opposite natured female under 50. Please write to Box (140) 717.

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Books/Publications

WORLD-WIDE out-of-print service founded 1948. Phone 081-876 7254 (24-hours). Hammersmith Books, High Street, London SW13 9LR.

NS/NSS FOR SALE. Most issues July 1976 to February 1990, many in binders. Write for details to Box (139) 713.

WHAT IS FASCISM? WHAT IS DEMOCRACY? WHAT IS GENOCIDE? Pamphlet by Paul Pawlowski. Price £1 from The Oliver Cromwell Republican Party of England, 44 Water Street, Accrington, Lancashire BB5 6QZ.

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FULL-TIME VOLUNTEERS REQUIRED. Day Centre for homeless people near London Bridge. Sat-Wed, 9am-3pm. 3-6 month commitment. £55 per week. Contact Paddy Boyle: 071-403 1931.

DRINKLINE provides information, advice and support to callers who are worried about their own or someone else's drinking. We operate 7 nights a week between 6-11pm and we urgently need more volunteers to join our team of committed Helpliners. Prospective Helpliners will be required to attend an initial training period. Ongoing supervision and training is provided. Please contact us on: 071-332 0150.

Personal

F(RANCES) W(ORSLEY) STELLA BROWNE (1880-1955), feminist, socialist, journalist, translator, founder of ALRA: any information about life, career, associates, location of papers concerning, for biographical study. Dr Lesley Hall, 76 Tytherton Road, London N19 4QA.

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ENDGAMES: Weekend Competition

No 3304 Set by Margaret Rogers
We asked for prose in which the clichés were relevant, ie, where the suburbs really *were* leafy, and where the leaves played a significant part in the story.

Report by Ms de Meaner
Well, I tried, and failed, to do my report under the rules of this comp. This softened me towards those who plainly had had their little difficulties. I even felt quite gentle towards T Griffiths who had not understood the rules and merely *wrote* in clichés. And jolly nice ones they were, T. In fact, I think you could have first prize for the sheer number contained in your entry: " . . . leafy suburb in autumn. Worse than a needle in a haystack," Lucas said. "The inquiry is hanging by a thread, no stone must be left unturned, no avenue left unexplored," Maigret replied. "Not to put too fine a point on it," Lucas said, "they'll have to keep their eyes skinned . . . " And so, wonderfully, on.

Twelve newly minted pounds to the winners, plus three extra to Basil Ransome-Davies.

I think it was the calm before the storm. the calm after the storm, like the storm itself, was yet to come. Everything was quiet as a mouse.

The mouse was dead, and it was imperative to start investigating before the storm eliminated all traces. Some person or persons unknown had done it.

But who?

This was the psychological moment for Jimmy Redneck. But when the call came through, he threw caution to the winds. He abandoned the lecture on Wilhelm Reich and hit the street. The clouds had burst. It was not only blowy, but raining cats and dogs.

Redneck grimaced. Too many animal corpses. He didn't like it. He smelled a rat. And a gerbil. And a horse's head.

He had a hunch, but the cruel taunts had never stopped him being a dedicated copper. Squatting over the bodies, he sensed a common factor. Max, maybe—a local boy who could always be found in the nearest pub. He was under age, so they never served him. That had made Max bitter.

You and me both, Max—we have to endure this Vale of Tears, Redneck thought. It was an oddly apt name for the pub.

When they saw Redneck a dying fall ensued. It was Max, deprived of the oxygen of publicity. The suicide note was pure pap. Pets Are Pests—the animal-hating terror group. And it was a foregone conclusion that the reasoning was circular.

Redneck turned and walked out into the drain.

Basil Ransome-Davies

Jones Minor was opening a can of worms when the games master came up.

"You degenerate little brute," he shouted. "When I was at school, we took them with a pinch of salt, but you lads expect jam on it."

"No jam, Sir, they're half-baked."

"Many's the time I've had to swallow a toad in this place, boy, just to survive—and here you are standing up to me and giving me cheek."

"I wouldn't stand up to you, or give you cheek, Sir, not with your track record."

"That record went years ago, and it's been broken long since."

"Only a cliché, Sir, you know what I mean. And that's what people mean by a can of worms, too. You're a kid-fancier, Sir."

"You get my goat, young Jones."

"Get it yourself, Sir. At least that animal saves some of us from feeling that we've been sitting on the fence for too long."

"Another toad. The biology master will be wondering what's happened to all his specimens."

"What terrible people schoolmasters are, Sir. Quis custodiet custodies?"

"I keep a pile of them in my room, boy. Come up and see the Doonesbury cartoons."

Robin Oakley-Hill

"Accidents will happen," Blenkinsop used to say, and they usually did—to *him*. Ever since October 1953, when he upset the apple cart in Covent Garden market, his life had been a catalogue of disasters. He played with fire for a time, but the circus decided his act was a danger to the public. Then he tried plumbing, until he flooded the upstairs rooms of Botley Manor. Lady Markham's large menagerie of domestic pets were in her bedroom when the floor collapsed and, for a time, it rained cats and dogs on her husband below. He's had a pet aversion ever since.

GRYPH'S QUIZ

The answers all have something in common

1. Spot
2. Shelter
3. WC
4. Herb
5. Volition
6. Domineer
7. Prison
8. Brighton &Wigan features
9. Small flag
10. At least 3,220m

Answers below

"Après moi, le déluge," muttered Blenkinsop as he drove his van at speed into the manor's ha-ha, where Lord Markham, in colourful language, added insult to injury until the ambulance arrived. The meteorite that, three days later, destroyed Blenkinsop's Alfa-Romeo was regarded by his insurance company as a bolt from the blue, and therefore an Act of God, and they refused his claim; while the burning question of who torched his Chelsea flat remains, even now, unsolved.

In middle age, he turned to writing, but the *Literary Review* rejected his poems as being without rhyme or reason, and soon he was living dangerously again, taking a bull by the horns at the Royal Devon show, for a bet, and regretting it; marrying a call-girl, and almost dying in harness when she introduced him to the pleasures of bondage.

Watson Weeks

No 3307 Set by Margaret Rogers
"A rose is a rose is a rose"—but what does it mean? Explanations in the style of any famous writer by 9 December. Max 200 words.

Correction
On 8 October, the answers to the quiz were all units of currency. Although we listed the countries from which these came, we forgot to list the actual coinage: these were: 1) Colon; 2) Yen; 3) Lev; 4) Denier; 5) Pound; 6) Mark; 7) Anna; 8) Real; 9) Bolivar; 10) Dong.

Quiz answers

All are male forenames: 1) Mark; 2) Lee; 3) John; 4) Basil; 5) Will; 6) Hector; 7) Nick; 8) Piers; 9) Jack; 10) Miles

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CHESS

As the final ripples of the World Championship ebb away, Raymond Keene has wasted no time in writing *The Official Book of the Match*. It is undoubtedly the best "instant" book about a match ever, the principal reason being that each game has the appended comments of the two participants. This is a big innovation. Previous works of this type have been apt to contain major misunderstandings of players' motives. In his book of the 1981 Karpov v Korchnoi World Championship Match, *Massacre In Merano*, Keene noted that even very strong grandmasters would frequently get it quite wrong when trying to explain to the spectators what the players were up to. Here, we are given the most profound "hot off the press" insights yet.

Short remarks, about Kasparov's serious time pressure in game two, that he now feels that it may be right to use only digital clocks in international events, and he attributes his loss on time in game one, in a clearly favourable position, to difficulty in reading the clock. I remarked quite early on, watching the first game, how surprised I was to see such a type of clock in use. In the opening round of the 1986 GLC tournament, I lost on time against Short himself in a drawn ending, and later in the same event both Larsen and Polugaevsky lost on time against me. After this, I always made it clear that I did not want to play using this clock again, and on one of the rare subsequent occasions when I did agree to use it, against Peter Wells in the 1987 British Championship, he lost on time with several moves to make, when my clock was running.

I have to disagree with Angela Eagle ("Short's shrift", *NSS*, 22 Oct) that the match was little more spectacular than watching paint dry, because there was little audience participation. She should have checked out the analysis conducted in the bars of the Savoy theatre where there was lively and fruitful interchange between the commentating grandmasters and the public.

There were some critical comments from sectors of the press about the financing of the *Times*' extravaganza. The much-vaunted Predict-a-Move idea turned out to be a bit of a turkey and was soon axed and there were claims that ticket sales were well down on the anticipated figure.

I have one suggestion for future World Championship sponsors to assist with balancing the books: charge for the moves. This is already the practice for big shogi (Japanese chess) tournaments in Japan where, coincidentally, the sponsor is usually a newspaper. Anyone wishing to publish the moves of the game has to pay the sponsor for them. An unsuccessful attempt to copyright the moves of chess games was made in the 1920s, but it strikes me as wholly logical that, if television footage of the games is to be paid for, then the same ought to apply for the actual moves, since they are part of the event and not just some abstraction from it. Something for the commissioner of the PCA, attorney Robert Rice, to mull over.

By losing 6-1, Nigel Short clocked up a further 13 ELO points, making his revised rating now 2680, and along the way picked up £637,500. Kasparov rates Short's chances of challenging him again, now that he has benefited from 20 of the best chess lessons going, as excellent. Personally, I expect it to be one of Ivanchuk, Anand or Adams, but Short will certainly be a frontrunner.

There was good news from Budapest last week, as 19-year-old Matthew Sadler recorded his final grandmaster norm. He came close in August at the Lloyds Bank Masters but had the rough finish of facing Nunn and Adams in the final two rounds. I recommend the bulletin of this event, from which this alarming fifth-round escapade is taken.

White: M Adams. Black: P Wells. 1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bb5 a6 4.Ba4 Nf6 5.0-0 Be7 6.Qe2 b5 7.Bb3 0-0 8.c3 d6 9.d4 exd4 10.cxd4 Bg4 11.Rd1 d5 12.e5 Ne4 13.a4 b4 14.a5 Kh8!? 15.h3?! . . . 15.Qc2!, as in J Polgar v Spassky, was better. **15 . . . Bh5 16.Be3?** . . . Again 16.Qc2! **16 . . . f5! 17.Rc1 f4! 18.Rxc6 fxe3 19.fxe3 Bxf3 20.gxf3 Bh4! 21.Qg2** . . . Or 21.fxe4 Qg5+ 22.Kh1 Rf2! 23.Qg4 Rf1+ 24.Kg2 Qxe3 with a decisive attack. **21 . . . Bf2+ 22.Kh1 Bxe3 23.Rc2** . . . Or 23.fxe4 Rf2 24.Qg4 Rf1+ 25.Kh2 Qf8 and wins. **23 . . . Qh4!** White Resigned. A stunning *blitzkrieg* from Wells, against one of the world's best players.

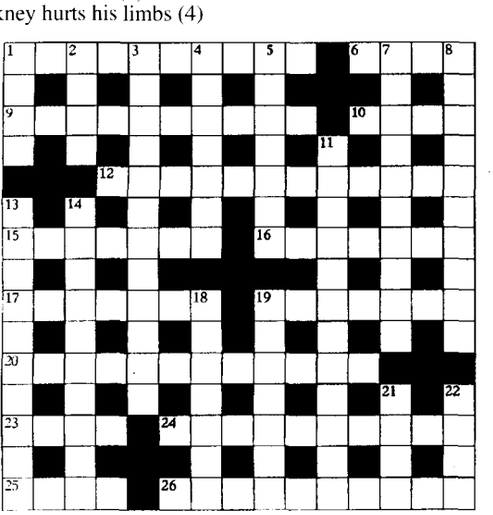
James Plaskett

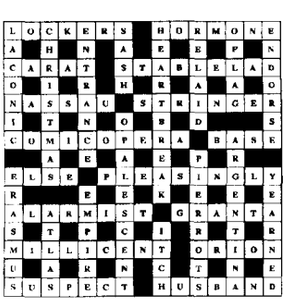
CROSSWORD

Crossword 1672
£5 book tokens for the first three correct solutions opened. Entries to Crossword 1672, New Statesman & Society, Foundation House, Perseverance Works, 38 Kingsland Road, London E2 8DQ, by Monday 29 November.

ACROSS
1. Take part in government as a means of selling a priest (10)
6. Cabin key (4)
9. Fishing smack? What nonsense! (10)
10. Plant which is fashionable when carried by a scholar (4)
12. Plant which shows up her wounds too badly (12)
15. Fretted when the tree appeared in colour (7)
16. T S Eliot translated for ladies and gentlemen (7)
17. The bloody newspaper returned and had a leading article falsified (7)
19. Where romance comes in disguise (7)
20. How to call a variant of true clan without a sign (12)
23. Lacking feminine lead the truth becomes bits of play (4)
24. One who finds out a record ended with hesitation? (10)
25. River which comes from the Broads (4)
26. Here actors may be found places for putting about Othello's turn (10)

DOWN
1. Chief for a time without a capital (4)
2. Produced a girl, we hear (4)
3. Island discovered in fresh territory (12)
4. Unhappy about an instrument being honoured (7)
5. Eating away like an animal from the east (7)
7. A tough animal but battered in his ring corner (10)
8. Something to eat which makes the spirit break (5,4)
11. Transport worker needing different waterway (12)
13. Illegal activity is potentially a big danger (10)
14. One who bears a grudge about capital needed for medical equipment (10)
18. Learn about the sick getting up although he takes things easy (7)
19. The skin has to count for something about a pound (7)
21. Florence's flower (4)
22. Cockney hurts his limbs (4)





SOLUTION TO 1670:

Winners of Crossword 1670
C Diamond, Essex
J Bennett, Cheshire
M Coan, Edinburgh

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BACKCHAT

Mat Coward finds that today's Tories are incapable of selecting the right victims

All this one-parent monsters nonsense has highlighted one of the principal weaknesses of Major's shambles as compared with Thatcher's shambles: the current lot wouldn't know a decent bogeyperson if it bit them on the nose and then buggered them.

Now Margaret, she really knew how to create an enemy within. Indeed, she built an entire political career on her skill at scapegoatery. But then, she understood the rules.

First of all, she knew you have to pick a target group that doesn't include too many of your own supporters. Thatcher, remember, started with shop stewards—little Hitlers, shop-floor Napoleons, assembly-line Stalins—a community with which, she sensibly reasoned, she had little to lose.

As her anti-employment policies diluted the trades unionists' ogre factor, she quickly moved on to immigrants, or aliens, as she called them. The great advantage of darkie-bashing is that it focuses on a population that is both very small and very noticeable. Small is beautiful, because it means that almost everybody is excluded; and visible is important, as otherwise, with such a tiny band of victims, people might not really believe it exists at all.

Then there were the scroungers. The outstanding characteristic of scroungers is that you will never meet anyone who admits to being one; more than that, you will never meet anyone who even suspects that they might be one. They are, therefore, perfect—not only are scroungers always, by definition, other people, but it doesn't matter if you're unable to produce any living specimens, or any evidence of your success in defeating them.

Thatcher was also keen on foreigners, of all sorts; they best thing about them being that they don't have a vote anyway, so upsetting them poses no risk. The miners, however, were a bit more tricky. They were numerous, they weren't subject to the kind of automatic popular dislike that attached itself to other targets, and they were traditionally well organised. But then, that just shows the basic difference between Maggie the Ripper and Jack the Dripper—she had the confidence, the vivacity, to gamble everything on a single victory-or-death charge.

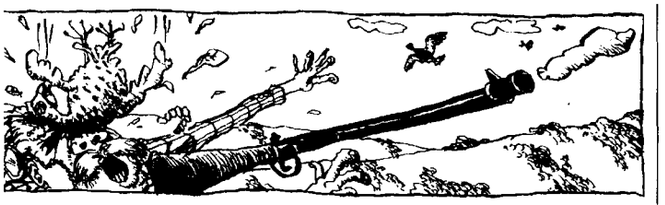
Her last significant attempt at bogeyfication centred on the "Moaning Minnies". Remember them? Probably not, but then allowances have to be made for the historical circumstances prevailing at the time: she was on her way out by then, under unimaginable pressures, and even the greatest scapegoater can only keep it up for so long before the madness finally eclipses the genius.

Still and all, I bet the Tories wish their artificial earths were stocked with anything half as plausible as a Moaning Minnie today. The most stupid member of the cabinet (Hi, John) cannot seriously expect to convince the nation that an excess of hunt saboteurs is to blame for the collapse of the health service, or that bail bandits make the trains run late.

No, I'm afraid your contemporary Conservative, your present-day rubber baron, just hasn't got the knack. If Britain is a chicken shed full of slaughtered birds and scrambled eggs, then everyone knows that it was the owners themselves who ran riot there under cover of daylight, and the search for a believable fox gets more desperate and self-defeating by the hour.

I mean, honestly, single parents: pathetic! Breaks every rule of the game. There's millions of them, every family contains at least one, and they are (or were) just as likely to vote Tory as not. It would be hard to devise a less suitable whipping-boy—with the possible exception of OAPs, and their wilfully extravagant heating bills.

FORTEANA



Paul Sieveking traces the strange history of Venice's cursed palace

When the Italian business tycoon Raul Gardini blew his brains out at the end of last July in Milan, most of the Italian media wrote of the event in the context of the massive corruption scandal that had already led to 11 suicides. Magistrates were chasing a trail of evidence that allegedly linked Gardini to a £60-million payoff to top politicians. The former chairman of the Ferruzzi family's business empire, Gardini knew he could soon be arrested.

In Venice, however, the media and the gossip mill gave the event a different spin: Gardini owned the Ca' Dario palace on the Grand Canal, and was said to have been the latest victim of its curse. The Ca' Dario has often attracted special attention, not all of it flattering. An Italian poet once likened the sumptuous structure with its gaudy mix of architectural styles to "a decrepit courtesan bowed beneath the weight of her baubles".

The palace was commissioned in 1488 by Giovanni Dario, the Venetian diplomat who negotiated peace with the Turks in 1479. He didn't spend much time there because he kept being dispatched abroad. "I have entered my eighth decade and am grown so fat and am so afflicted with illness that my last days are nigh, and I would like to spend them at home," he wrote in desperation to the Doge, who had just ordered him to go from Constantinople to Persia.

The first serious misfortune at the palace has been traced to the nobleman's son-in-law, Vincenzo Barbaro, who insulted an official and was publicly disgraced and stripped of his office. He was later murdered; his wife Marietta, Dario's daughter, died of shame. Her tomb and that of her father, nearby, were later used to store gunpowder, and were blown up during an Austrian siege in 1849.

Details of subsequent owners are murky. An Armenian diamond merchant who once owned the palace is said to have gone spectacularly bankrupt. Rawdon Lubbock Brown, an English historian and friend of Robert Browning, bought Ca' Dario in 1839 and spent a fortune on it; he, too, went bankrupt and allegedly killed himself. The building was split into flats and the French poet Henri de Regner acquired one, dying there of malaria.

Venetians began to see the palace as a deadly and seductive mistress who exacted revenge on those who sought to own her. The tenor Mario del Monaco entered into negotiations to buy—then broke them off after a car accident in Monaco. The next victim was an American eccentric called Charles Briggs who owned the palace from the 1950s and was thrown out of Italy "because he invited to many Italian soldiers round for parties", remembers John Hohnsbeen, a longtime American resident who once lived in a villa two doors from the palace.

After the expulsion of Briggs, the reclusive Count Filippo delle Lanze from Turin bought the doom-laden pile in 1968. Two years later, he was murdered there by his Yugoslav butler/lover Raul Blasich, who beat his head to a pulp with a candelabrum. The next owner, Kit Lambert, manager of The Who, complained that the bloodstains were still on the bedroom floor when he moved in.

Lambert is remembered fondly in Venice because he entertained lavishly. But his health was worn away by drugs and alcohol, and a brain tumour carried him off at the age of 45. Lambert's ownership was followed by that of Venetian financier Fabrizzio Ferrari, whose sister died in a car crash. He lost his fortune and was ruined.

Raul Gardini went out of his way to buy the palace in the 1980s from a German insurance company. He bought the company and sold it—minus the palace—to an insurer owned by the Ferruzzis. Then he transferred Ca' Dario to his own family's assets. He gave it to his daughter as a wedding gift, but the marriage failed. The daughter still lives there and the family has no plans to sell—although she may soon move out.

Paul Sieveking is editor of "Fortean Times"

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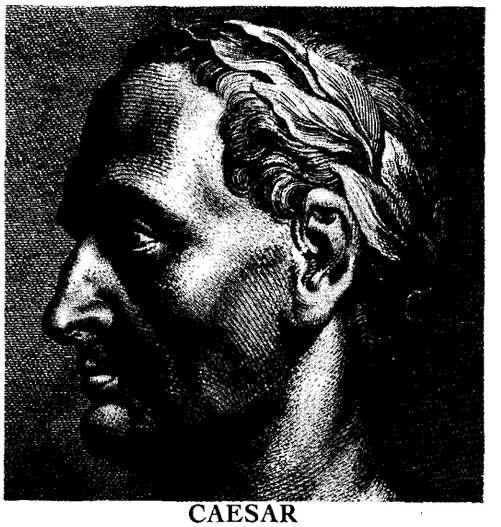
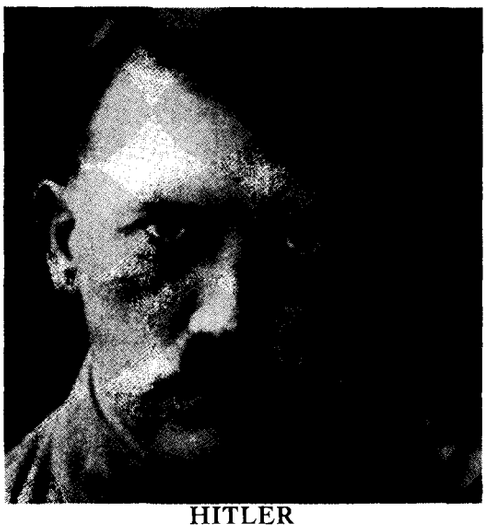
Some of the famous names who've drawn our maps for us.

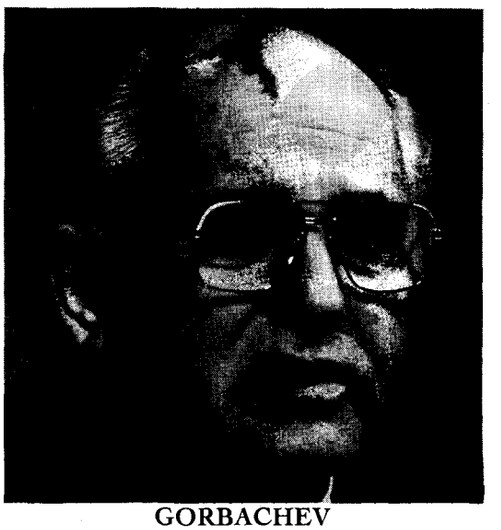
GENGHIS KHAN



CAESAR

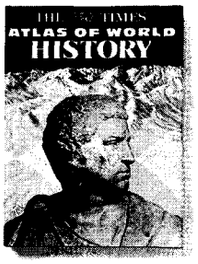


HITLER



GORBACHEV

Genghis Khan used sabres, Hitler 70mm shells. Both made an indelible impact on the worlds of their time.



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